from Craving to Liberation



from Grasping to Emptiness

Excursions into the Thought-World of the Pāli Discourses

Bhikkhu Anālayo

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Pariyatti Press
an imprint of

Pariyatti Publishing
867 Larmon Road, Onalaska, WA, USA 98570

www.pariyatti.org

The material on which the present book is based was originally published in the *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*, Sri Lanka, under the following headwords: Rāga, Sakkāyadiṭṭhi, Samādhi, Samatha & Vipassanā, Sammādiṭṭhi, Saṅkhāra, Sukha, Suññatā, Taṇhā, Thīnamiddha, Tuṇhībhāva, Uddhaccakukkucca, Upādāna, Upakkilesa Sutta, Upekkhā, Uttarimanussadhamma, Vedanā, Vedanānupassanā, Vibhavataṇhā, Vicikicchā, Vimokkha, Vimuttāyatana, Vimutti, Vipassanā, Vipassanañāṇa, Virāga, Vitakka, Vitakkasaṇṭhāna Sutta, Viveka, Vossagga, Vyāpāda, Yathābhūtañāṇadassana, Yoniso Manasikāra, Yuganaddha Sutta.

The same material has already appeared in two separate monographs entitled *From Craving to Liberation – Excursions into the Thought-world of the Pāli Discourses (1)* and *From Grasping to Emptiness – Excursions into the Thought-world of the Pāli Discourses (2)*.

ISBN: 978-1-928706-98-4 (Print)

ISBN: 978-1-938754-16-6 (ePub)

ISBN: 978-1-938754-16-6 (Mobi)

ISBN: 978-1-928706-99-1 (PDF eBook)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2012941629

Introduction

The essays collected in the present book are revised versions of entries originally published in the Encyclopaedia of Buddhism, Sri Lanka. My main emphasis in each case is on exploring a particular term from the perspective of the early Pāli discourses, while other sources - be these later Pāli works, Chinese parallels, or secondary publications on the matter at hand - are taken into consideration only in a supplementary fashion.

The first part of the present book deals mainly with factors or states of mind that are detrimental and need to be overcome, the middle section turns to key doctrinal terms and the development of insight, while the last part takes up themes related to the goal of such development.

Thus the selection begins by examining "craving", "grasping" and "passion" as root defilements of the mind that need to be understood and overcome. Given that passion is quite similar to sensual desire, the first in the standard listing of the five hindrances, the selection skips this term and directly turns to the remaining four hindrances of "ill-will", "sloth-and-torpor", "restlessness-and-worry" and "doubt".

Then I turn to the significance of "personality view" and "right view", followed by exploring the significance of *saṅkhāra*s and thoughts. Next I explore the significance of "feelings" and the implications of "contemplation of feelings". This is followed by a survey of "happiness" and "equanimity", both being aspects of feelings and at the same time terms whose significance goes beyond feelings, since both are also fruits of successful insight practice, the topic of the final part of the present book.

Subsequent themes taken up are "knowledge and vision according to reality" and the similar "wise attention", followed by considering the theme of "insight", before turning to its

complement in the development of "concentration". Minor themes taken up in the wake of concentration are "seclusion" and "letting go". The significance of "emptiness" and the conception of "liberation" in the Pāli discourses, which covers accomplishment in the realm of tranquillity as well as of insight, form the conclusion to my explorations.

While I have tried to arrange the above topics in a meaningful manner, the essays in the present book were originally written as independent contributions. They do not necessarily build on each other and thus can be read in whatever sequence the reader may prefer.

When revising the original Encyclopaedia articles, I have tried to adapt my presentation to the general readership. Thus I dispense with footnoting and use round brackets to provide references, intending with this procedure to make it easier for the reader to jump over information that may not be of immediate interest. In general terms I hope that, without sacrificing academic rigour, I am able to present material of practical interest for those who approach Buddhism as a system of mental development.

To conclude this introduction, I would like to express my gratitude to all those who have helped by commenting on this collection in its draft stages, to the editor of the Encyclopaedia of Buddhism for giving me copyright permission, and to Bhikkhu Bodhi for having laid the foundation to all my writings through his kind tuition. Needless to say, I am solely responsible for any remaining errors.

1. Craving / *Taṇhā*

According to the early Buddhist analysis of existence, craving, or *taṇhā*, is the very root cause of the *saṃsār*ic predicament, being the central factor responsible for the arising of *dukkha*, as highlighted in the second noble truth. Due to its pivotal role as the chief cause of bondage, *taṇhā* features in numerous passages and contexts in the early discourses, and forms the topic of an entire chapter in the *Dhammapada* (Dhp 334-359).

In the present chapter, I will first of all explore the nature of *taṇhā* with the help of a number of similes from the Pāli discourses, which bring out various aspects of *taṇhā* (1.1). Next I will survey different types of craving and examine in some detail the conception of craving for non-existence, *vibhavataṇhā* (1.2). Having explored the nature of craving, I will continue by examining the arising of craving (1.3), the implications of its cessation (1.4), and the steps to be undertaken in order to arrive at freedom from *taṇhā* (1.5).

1.1 Craving Imagery

The term *taṇhā* literally stands for "thirst", a meaning echoed also in its near synonym *tasiṇā*. *Taṇhā* - as a figurative type of thirst that demands the satisfaction of desires - manifests as a sense of lack or want, and has its root in dissatisfaction. Various aspects of craving are reflected in the use of a range of imageries and similes in the discourses.

One such image speaks of being enmeshed by craving, of being caught in the net of craving. This image occurs in a dis-

course in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* that examines one-hundred-and-eight manifestations of craving (AN II 211-213). The discourse begins by distinguishing eighteen forms of internal craving and eighteen forms of external craving. The internal manifestations of craving are various modes of imagination that begin with the basic notion "I am", which then leads to imaginations of the type "I am like this", "should I be otherwise?", "may I become like this", etc. Their external counterparts come into being when this same notion "I am" is related to the external world, as for example in the form "by this I am", etc. Adding these two modes together, and relating them to the past, the present and the future, results in one-hundred-and-eight ways of bondage, which according to this *Aṅguttara-nikāya* discourse equals being enmeshed by craving, *taṇhā-jālinā*.

The relation provided in the above *Aṅguttara-nikāya* discourse between the net of craving and the issue of self notions recurs in the *Mahātaṇhāsaṅkhaya-sutta*. This discourse points out that the monk Sāti, who stubbornly held on to the erroneous view that the same consciousness transmigrates in *saṃsāra*, was caught in the great net of craving, *mahātaṇhā-jāla* (MN I 271). The relation between craving and views in general comes to light in a discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya*, according to which speculative views about the future destiny of a Tathāgata after death are simply a product of delighting in craving, *taṇhā-rāma*, of enjoying and rejoicing in craving, *taṇhā-rata taṇhā-samudita* (SN IV 390).

The net imagery recurs in relation to craving in general in a verse in the *Theragāthā*, which compares the condition of one who has destroyed the net of craving, *taṇhā-jāla*, to the stainless moon on a clear night (Th 306). The *Dhammapada* also employs this imagery, when it contrasts the net-like nature of craving to the freedom attained by the Buddha who, in contrast

to such forms of entrapment, has a limitless range, *ananta-gocara* (Dhp 180).

The aspect of craving as a form of bondage, *bandhana* (SN I 8), which underlies the net imagery, recurs also in other similes. Overcome by craving, *tasiṇā*, beings run around in circles comparable to a rabbit caught in a snare (Dhp 342). Covered by craving's cloak, *taṇhā-chadana-chāditā*, they are in bondage like a fish in a trap (Ud 76).

The idea of bondage or binding together also underlies a simile that presents craving as a seamstress, *taṇhā sibbanī*. This seamstress sews together contact, its arising and cessation; or else it sews together past, future and present; or else pleasure, pain, and neither-pleasure-nor-pain; or else name, form and consciousness; or else sense-organs, sense-objects and consciousness; or else personality, its arising and its cessation (AN III 399 - 402, commenting on Sn 1042). Whichever of these complementary perspectives is taken on the seamstress of craving, its result is the continuity of becoming, *bhava*, and hence the continuity of *dukkha*.

This sticky craving, *taṇhā visattikā* (Dhp 335), is a yoke that binds beings to existence, *taṇhā-yoga* (It 50). It causes beings to take up the burden of the five aggregates, *taṇhā vuccati bhārādānaṃ* (SN III 26); in fact it is responsible for the very arising and existence of a being, *satta* (SN III 190). At death, such a being will be carried on to its next rebirth based on craving, *taṇhupādāna,* like a flame carried on by the wind (SN IV 400). That is, from the perspective of faring on in *saṃsāra*, craving is the fetter par excellence, *taṇhā-saṃyojana* (It 8).

Another set of images revolves around the theme of growth in nature. These images alert us to the danger of allowing craving to follow its natural course, thereby becoming forever stronger. This aspect can be seen in a *Dhammapada* verse that compares the fertility of the underlying tendency to craving,

taṇhānusaya, to a tree that grows again after being cut down. Similarly, as long as its roots are left intact, craving will grow again (Dhp 338). Hence craving together with its root need to be removed (SN I 16).

The idea of growth recurs also in a discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, according to which craving is the moisture, *taṇhā sineho*, due to which the seed of consciousness grows in the field of karma (AN I 223). Craving is like a creeper, *taṇhā-lata* (Th 1094), that needs to be cut in order to reach liberation. A verse in the *Dhammapada* takes up the same image, pointing out that in the case of those who are heedless, craving will grow like a creeper, *māluvā viya* (Dhp 334). As a result, the same verse explains, beings proceed from one life to another, comparable to a monkey that leaps from tree to tree in search of fruit.

The simile of the monkey that leaps from tree to tree provides a convenient lead over to the idea of faring on endlessly, an idea that comes to the fore in another set of images that relate craving to a stream. There is no stream like craving, *n' atthi taṇhāsamā nadī,* warns a verse in the *Dhammapada* (Dhp 251). Another passage points out that those who are under the power of craving are carried along by the stream, *taṇhādhipannā anusota-gāmino* (AN II 6). Hence the task is to completely cut off craving just like drying up a fast flowing river (Sn 3). By thorough comprehension of craving the flood will be crossed (Sn 1082), and one who has completely eradicated craving, an *arahant*, is one who has cut the stream, *chinna-soto* (SN IV 292).

A more detailed treatment of the stream imagery can be found in a discourse in the *Itivuttaka* (It 113-115). This discourse describes a man who allows himself to be carried along by a pleasant stream. An onlooker from the bank of that river warns the man that soon this river will lead to a pool with whirlpools and dangerous beings. Encountering these dangers,

the man carried along by the river will suffer death or meet with suffering similar to death. This image draws out the treacherous nature of the stream of craving and sounds a stern warning against succumbing to its all too powerful pull. The whole world, in fact, is being led here and there by this powerful pull of craving, *taṇhāya nīyati loko* (SN I 39). The helpless predicament that results from falling prey to craving is highlighted again in another simile, which compares beings under the influence of craving for existence, *taṇhā-gataṃ bhavesu*, to fish wriggling in water that is about to dry up (Sn 776-777).

The danger inherent in succumbing to craving, to which this simile alerts, becomes even more conspicuous in another set of similes that compare craving to a dart or an arrow. The world is afflicted by this dart of craving, *taṇhā-sallena otiṇṇo* (SN I 40), always burning with desires. The same image also recurs in several verses in the *Theragāthā*, where monks formulate the strong determination that they will neither take food nor leave their hut (Th 223 and 313), or even sit down at all (Th 514), until the dart of craving has finally been removed.

The *Sunakkhatta-sutta* provides additional background to the dart imagery (MN II 260), explaining that the dart of craving is smeared with the poison of ignorance and has hit the wound of the six internal sense-bases. The surgeon who pulls out the dart of craving from this wound is the Tathāgata, and to remove this dart requires mindfulness as the probe and noble wisdom as the knife. The Buddha as the good physician who teaches the path to freedom from craving is therefore called the destroyer of the dart of craving, *taṇhā-sallassa hantāra* (SN I 192). A complementary image, also taken from the realm of physical affliction, presents craving as the tumour's root, *gaṇḍa-mūla* (SN IV 83), that needs to be removed in order to arrive at a state of mental health.

A discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* indicates that even if a monk should be living in remote places, far removed from contact with others, as long as this monk has not removed craving, he cannot really be reckoned as one who dwells in solitude. The reason is that he has craving as his second, that is, as his companion (SN IV 36).

The same discourse thus introduces yet another image related to craving: that of one's second, one's ever-present companion, *taṇhā dutiyo puriso* (Sn 740). This image brings out the ever-present deep seated feeling of dissatisfaction engendered by craving, a wanting so ingrained in one's habitual experience of the world that it is almost taken for granted. In fact, according to another passage *taṇhā* can be appropriated as a self, *'taṇhā attā 'ti* (MN III 284). That is, craving is so well entrenched in experience that it has become part of one's sense of identity. This makes the removal of craving all the more difficult, since to reach freedom from craving not only requires developing the insight that craving is inexorably bound up with dissatisfaction and frustration, but also requires giving up part of what is experienced as "I" and "mine".

This ever-present companion is quite powerful and often enough takes the leading role, so much so that, with craving as one's second, one easily becomes a slave to craving, *taṇhā-dāsa*. The implications of being a slave to craving are drawn out in the *Raṭṭhapāla-sutta* (MN II 71). According to this discourse, King Koravya was puzzled by the fact that the young and healthy Raṭṭhapāla, son of the wealthiest house in town, had decided to leave all possessions and relatives behind in order to go forth as a Buddhist monk. When explaining to the king what had motivated him, Raṭṭhapāla referred to the image of being a slave to craving, *taṇhā-dāso*.

Asked by the king to draw out the implications of this image, Raṭṭhapāla inquired what the king would do if he heard that among the neighbouring territories to the east a land could be

found full of riches and easy to conquer. The king replied that he would certainly conquer it. Raṭṭhapāla kept on asking the same question for territories found in the other directions, including territories found far beyond the sea. In each case the king had to admit that he would wish to conquer them. In this way, Raṭṭhapāla was able to bring home to the king the insatiability of his thirst for power, a mode of craving suitably drawn from the king's own field of experience. Paradoxically enough, the very craving for more power turns the king into a slave, a slave of craving.

As the example provided in the *Raṭṭhapāla-sutta* shows, the arising of craving can take place quite independent of any real need, since even the king of the country, in spite of being more powerful than anyone else in his kingdom, will never be satisfied with his dominion, always ready to exert himself in order to further extend his domain.

1.2 Types of Craving

The standard exposition of the second noble truth differentiates between sensual craving, *kāma-taṇhā*, craving for existence, *bhava-taṇhā*, and craving for non-existence, *vibhava-taṇhā* (e.g. SN V 421). The first of these, sensual craving, could manifest in relation to any of the six senses, resulting in six modes of craving according to each sense-object. These are the six *taṇhā-kāyā*, which comprise *rūpa-taṇhā, sadda-taṇhā, gandha-taṇhā, rasa-taṇhā, phoṭṭhabba-taṇhā,* and *dhamma-taṇhā* (e.g. DN III 244). Craving for existence could be for material or immaterial forms of existence, resulting in *rūpa-taṇhā* and *arūpa-taṇhā*, which the *Saṅgīti-sutta* lists together with *nirodha-taṇhā*, "craving for cessation"(DN III 216).

The *Saṅgīti-sutta* also presents a set of four types of craving more specifically related to the life of a monk or a nun, the *cattāro taṇhuppādā*, which comprise craving related to robes, to food, to lodging and to forms of existence (DN III 228). The

first three of these four recur in a verse in the *Sutta-nipāta* (Sn 339).

In addition, craving could also be related to views, *diṭṭhi-taṇhā* (AN II 12), to the four nutriments (SN II 101), to wealth (Dhp 355), or to appropriating in general, *ādāna-taṇhā* (Sn 1103).

Of the three types of craving mentioned in the second noble truth, a particularly intriguing concept is that of craving for "non-existence" or "non-becoming", *vibhava*. In order to ascertain the implications of this type of craving, I will at first survey the term *vibhava* on its own, after which I will turn to *vibhava-taṇhā*

Vibhava occurs regularly in the early discourses together with such synonyms as "annihilation", *uccheda*, and "destruction", *vināsa*. A view that propounds future non-existence, *vibhava-diṭṭhi*, is an extreme that has its counterpart in views that propose eternal existence. Those who uphold either of these two types of views are at odds with each other and, being under the influence of craving and clinging, will be unable to reach liberation (MN I 65). Caught up in these two types of views, mankind either lags behind or else overshoots the goal (It 43). Upholding *vibhava-diṭṭhi* overshoots the goal, as out of disgust with existence one develops delight in the notion of non-existence, perceiving the cessation of the self at death as peaceful and sublime.

A stark instance of annihilationist types of view that propound future non-existence would be the stance that according to the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta* was taken by Ajita Kesakambalī (DN I 55). The position attributed to him holds that a human being merely consists of the four elements. When someone passes away, all that happens is that the body will be carried to the cremation ground, the bones will turn white and all offerings turn into ashes. To assume some form of survival after

death is, according to this doctrine, merely empty prattle, as fools and wise alike will be annihilated at death and perish entirely. As the *Sandaka-sutta* points out, to uphold such a doctrine renders the living of a life dedicated to spiritual progress meaningless (MN I 515).

The situation of those who uphold annihilationism is quite vividly depicted in the *Pañcattaya-sutta*, which compares their predicament to a dog that is bound to a pillar and keeps running in circles around this pillar (MN II 232). The point of this image is that, in spite of being motivated by disenchantment with personal existence, *sakkāya*, annihilationism is unable to go beyond the inherent sense of identity. Instead, the annihilationists keep on running, as it were, in circles around the same personal existence they try to abandon. In whatever way such Brahmins and recluses may proclaim *vibhava* to be the escape from *bhava*, they will be unable to escape from existence (Ud 33). Only by leaving behind concern with *vibhava* and with *bhava* can future becoming be transcended, *vibhavañca bhavañca vippahāya ... khīnapunabbhavo* (Sn 514).

The decisive shift of perspective that is required to really transcend becoming can better be appreciated after taking a closer look at an aspiration that a discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* presents as the expression of an annihilationist view, *uccheda-diṭṭhi* (SN III 99). This aspiration reads: "may I not be, may it not be for me, I shall not be and it will not be for me", *no c' assaṃ, no ca me siyā, na bhavissāmi, na me bhavissati*. The *Saṃyutta-nikāya* discourse points out that this aspiration is rooted in ignorance and an expression of craving.

A discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, however, reckons this type of aspiration as the supreme among heterodox views, *aggaṃ bāhirakānaṃ diṭṭhigatānaṃ* (AN V 63). The reason for this comparatively favourable assessment in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* discourse may well be that a somewhat similar maxim was employed in Buddhist circles, with a small but decisive

difference. The modified mode of this aspiration reads "may it not be, may it not be for me, it shall not be, and it will not be for me", *no c'assa, no ca me siyā, na bhavissati, na me bhavissati* (MN II 24; SN III 55; AN IV, 70; Ud 78). By replacing the first person formulation in the verb forms with the third person, the need to go beyond the self-notion implicit in the annihilationist approach becomes apparent.

A discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* explains how this aspiration can lead to the eradication of the lower fetters and onwards to final liberation. Uninstructed worldlings do not realize that each of the five aggregates is impermanent, unsatisfactory and devoid of self. Noble disciples, in contrast, understand the true nature of the five aggregates and thereon apply themselves to the aspiration "may it not be, may it not be for me, it shall not be, and it will not be for me". Practising in this way, the destruction of the lower fetters can be expected (SN III 57).

If this aspiration does not cause the arising of fear, and if all passion in regard to the five aggregates is overcome, then consciousness becomes unestablished, *apatiṭṭhita*, and final liberation will be attained. The *Āneñjasappāya-sutta* notes that clinging to the equanimity developed in this way needs to be avoided in order for practice in accordance with this maxim to lead to final liberation (MN II 265).

According to the *Alagaddūpama-sutta*, contemporary recluses and Brahmins were of the opinion that the Buddha was an annihilationist, since they thought that he taught the annihilation, destruction and non-existence of an existing being, *sato sattassa ucchedaṃ vināsaṃ vibhavaṃ paññāpeti* (MN I 140). In reply to such mistaken assessments of his teaching, the Buddha would point out that what he taught was merely *dukkha* and its cessation.

General Sīha and the Brahmin Verañja had a similar misunderstanding of the Buddha's teaching. In reply to their assump-

tions that he was an annihilationist, the Buddha admitted, tongue in cheek, that in a way he could indeed by considered to be teaching annihilation: He taught the annihilation of unwholesome mental states, namely the annihilation of passion, anger and delusion (Vin I 235 = AN IV 182; Vin III 2 = AN IV 174).

Not only recluses and Brahmins, but at times even Buddhist monks could have misunderstandings in this respect. According to a discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya*, the monk Yamaka had proclaimed that an *arahant* will be annihilated at death (SN III 109). This amounts to adopting one of the four modes of predicting the future destiny of an awakened being, according to which a Tathāgata - a term that at times can stand for a liberated one in general - either exists after death, or does not exist, or both, or neither.

The Buddha consistently refused to take up any of these positions (e.g. MN I 484). The basic problem involved in such proposals is the same as the one illustrated in the *Pañcattaya-sutta* with the imagery of a dog that keeps running in circles around a pillar to which it is bound, representing the assumed existence of self about which predications can be made. The monk Yamaka's mistaken assertion was taken up by Sāriputta for closer examination, with the result that Yamaka had to admit that it was impossible to find a Tathāgata in truth and fact even here and now, hence what to say of any future existence or non-existence of a Tathāgata after death (SN III 112).

What happens at the death of an awakened one is put rather succinctly by the novice Adhimutta, who was about to be killed by a gang of brigands. Unruffled by any fear of death, he told the gang leader that, from his perspective, there was no cause to lament at the prospect of being killed, as merely *saṅkhāra*s will come to be non-existent, *saṅkhārā vibhavissanti, tattha kā paridevanā* (Th 715).

After this survey of the term *vibhava*, we are now ready to turn to craving for such non-existence or non-becoming, *vibhava-taṇhā*.

A self-evident example for such craving would be suicidal intentions, in the sense of those types of craving that motivate someone to forcefully put an end to life. Yet, for *vibhava-taṇhā* to be explicitly mentioned in the succinct presentation of the arising of *dukkha* in the second noble truth, alongside such basic motivating forces as sensual craving and craving for existence, *kāma-taṇhā* and *bhava-taṇhā*, one would expect *vibhava-taṇhā* to have broader implications than merely the wish to commit suicide.

Here it is of interest that the *Brahmajāla-sutta* lists seven grounds, *vatthu*, that lead to the arising of annihilationist views (DN I 34; see also Bodhi 1978). These seven are different modes of identifying a type of self and its cessation. The first of these seven modes identifies the self with the material body, assuming that with the death of the body the self will become annihilated. This mode of thinking would correspond to the type of reasoning that motivates suicide, which assumes that, by cutting short one's life and forcefully bringing about the death of the material body, all problems will similarly come to an end. Whether this is based on an explicit belief in a self or only on an implicit self-notion, the rationale behind such a suicidal attempt is to find a solution by attempting to escape from the material body.

In its treatment of annihilationist views, the *Brahmajāla-sutta* also lists the possibility of identifying the self with a divine material body that feeds on gross food, or with a divine mind-made body that is endowed with limbs and faculties. The final four grounds for annihilationist views in the *Brahmajāla-sutta* involve the four immaterial attainments, namely the attainment of boundless space, boundless consciousness, nothingness, and neither-perception-nor-non-perception.

From the perspective of attempting to find a deeper meaning and a broader scope of implication for the term *vibhava-taṇhā*, the final four grounds for annihilationist views listed in the *Brahmajāla-sutta* are intriguing. They suggest that non-existence or non-becoming may have been envisioned as a goal to be reached through meditation practice in ancient India, in particular through attaining any of the immaterial spheres.

Since the experience of these immaterial spheres requires a considerable amount of meditative proficiency and practice, an annihilationist view related to the attainment or experience of these states could not reasonably assume that all beings are destined to such annihilation. That is, from the perspective of the upholders of such a view, annihilation would probably not have been considered as the inevitable fate of all beings, but rather as a goal to be attained through an appropriate form of conduct and meditation practice.

The idea behind such an aspiration for annihilation could be a merger with a form of ultimate reality, held to be equivalent to boundless space, or to boundless consciousness, or to nothingness, or to neither-perception-nor-non-perception. Attaining such a merger at the death of the body, any self-hood would be successfully annihilated.

Support for this interpretation could be gathered from the *Dhātuvibhaṅga-sutta*, which describes the development of insight and detachment in regard to the experience of the immaterial attainments (MN III 244). In the concluding section of this description, just before turning to the attainment of final liberation, the *Dhātuvibhaṅga-sutta* indicates that at this high point of meditative development and mature insight one will be free from intentions and volitions in regard to existence or in regard to non-existence, *n' eva abhisaṅkharoti nābhisañcetayati bhavāya vā vibhavāya vā*.

In this context, intentions and volitions in regard to *vibhava* most certainly do not refer to any suicidal impulse. Instead, the implication of the passage seems to be that one who has reached this lofty stage of mental development is aloof from interest in any form of existence as well as in the type of merger with an ultimate immaterial reality, such as appears to be implicit in the *Brahmajāla-sutta*'s description.

That some contemporaries of the Buddha perceived annihilation as a goal to be attained through a particular mode of conduct and practice would also be implicit in the above-mentioned aspiration "may I not be, may it not be for me, I shall not be and it will not be for me", *no c' assaṃ, no ca me siyā, na bhavissāmi, na me bhavissati*, (SN III 99). Since this formulation clearly involves an aspiration, here again it would not make much sense to assume that all beings are destined to annihilation. Nor does this formulation appear to be merely the expression of a suicidal intent, otherwise the above-mentioned discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* would not reckon this aspiration as supreme among heterodox views (AN V 63). Instead, what this aspiration most probably implies is a form of annihilation that requires effort and practice, such as would indeed be required for attaining the immaterial spheres.

From this perspective, then, *vibhava-taṇhā* could be understood to comprise craving for annihilation in a materialist as well as a spiritual sense, ranging from the wish to destroy the physical body by suicide to the aspiration for leaving behind the sense of selfhood through a mystic merger with an ultimate reality. The decisive factor that these different modes of craving have in common is the assumed sense of a self that lurks behind them. From a Buddhist perspective, all these forms of craving are but manifestations of ignorance, since however refined the experience they aim at may be, the truth of the matter is that there was never a self to be annihilated in the first place.

1.3 The Arising of Craving

Factors that contribute to the arising of craving are mentioned in the second noble truth, according to which the arising of *dukkha* is directly related to craving that is accompanied by delight and passion, *nandī-rāga-sahagatā*, delighting here and there, *tatra tatrābhinandinī* (SN V 421). This reference to the tendency of delighting here and there, in this or that, reveals that once one perceives something as delightful, as gratifying, *assāda*, craving arises.

To highlight the dynamics that result from perceiving things as gratifying, the discourses employ several imageries. Just as a great fire, to which more fuel is added, will keep on burning for a long time, so for those who perceive things that can be clung to as gratifying, *upādāniyesu dhammesu assādānupassino*, craving will increase (SN II 85).

A related image recurs in another simile that illustrates the situation of those who perceive things that can fetter as gratifying, *saññojaniyesu dhammesu assādānupassino*. For them, craving will increase just as an oil lamp will keep burning as long as oil is added and the wick is adjusted (SN II 86). Perceiving things that can be clung to, or that can fetter, as gratifying receives an additional treatment in two similes taken from the growth of trees. These similes illustrate how perception of gratification fosters the growth of craving with the example of a great tree that is well nourished through its roots (SN II 87), or of a sapling that is well cared for and watered (SN II 89).

Another discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* takes up the same theme in more detail, explaining that craving arises and becomes established in regard to whatever in this world is pleasant and agreeable, by mistaking it to be lasting, to provide real happiness and satisfaction, and finally by appropriating it (SN II 109). This discourse compares giving in to such craving to a

thirsty man who partakes of a drink that is of exquisite taste, even though he knows it to contain poison.

These various presentations illustrate from complementary perspectives the indication given in the twelve-link presentation of dependent arising, *paṭicca samuppāda*, according to which the arising of *taṇhā* takes place in dependence on feeling, *vedana-paccayā* (SN II 1). Hence it is at the point when feelings arise and manifest that *taṇhā* needs to be kept in check. In a later chapter in this collection, the nature of feeling and its insightful contemplation will be examined further.

The indication that the condition for the arising of craving is to be found in feeling also has another dimension, which comes to the fore in a discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya*. According to this discourse, a monk asked the Buddha: "Who craves?" (SN II 13). Such a question is not appropriate, the Buddha pointed out, since an inquiry into the nature of craving should rather be worded in terms of: "What is the condition for craving?"

In addition to pointing out the role of feeling as the condition for craving, the twelve-link presentation of dependent arising also highlights that *taṇhā* in turn is responsible for the arising of *upādāna*, clinging or grasping, and ultimately therewith for the arising of *dukkha*.

The unwholesome consequences that arise due to *taṇhā* are treated in more detail in the *Dasuttara-sutta* (DN III 289), which enumerates nine states that are rooted in craving, *taṇhā-mūlaka*. These begin with the quest for the desired object, *pariyesanā*, which, when successful, in turn leads to gain, *lābha*. Having obtained gain requires making decisions about what should be done with such gains, *vinicchaya*, due to which arise passion and desire, *chanda-rāga*. These lead via attachment to appropriation, *ajjhosāna* and *pariggaha*, out of which avarice and hoarding result, *macchariya* and *ārakkha*. The end

result of all this, according to the *Dasuttara-sutta*, is the taking up of sticks and swords, quarrel, slander and falsehood etc.

These are the dire consequences that await those whose pursuit of the objects of craving has been successful. In the case of those who have not been able to satisfy the demands of their inner thirst, unwholesome states and reactions will arise all the more quickly.

The *Mahādukkhakkhandha-sutta* describes how taking sensual pleasures to be gratifying leads to a quest for obtaining them through earning a livelihood, a quest that in itself is often enough beset with much suffering, pain and at times even danger (MN I 86). When in spite of all effort this quest has not been successful, the poor victim sorrows and grieves, laments and weeps, crying in distress 'my work is in vain, my effort is fruitless'.

Should his or her efforts succeed, however, the gains will have to be protected against avaricious kings and cunning thieves, as well as against natural calamities. After depicting in detail the dangers that lurk at each of these successive steps needed to secure the objects of craving, the *Mahādukkhakkhandha-sutta* turns to the taking up of sticks and swords as the final result of the quest to satisfy craving. To illustrate this final result, the discourse describes in gruesome detail the suffering and evils of quarrel, warfare and crime in ancient India.

In addition to being directed to sensual pleasures, craving may also manifest in relation to various forms of existence. A discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* points out that a first beginning of craving for existence, *bhava-taṇhā*, cannot be predicated (AN V 116). That is, craving for existence has been one's companion since time immemorial. Nevertheless, according to the same discourse a condition for craving for existence can be pointed out right in the present, which is none other than ignorance, *avijjā*.

For the ignorant ones who allow themselves to succumb to the arising of craving, sorrows grow, just as grass grows after rain (Dhp 335). In contrast, sorrow falls off from those who overcome craving like water from a lotus flower (Dhp 336). The image of the lotus untouched by water leads us to the next aspect to be explored in relation to *taṇhā*, to the cessation of craving.

1.4 The Cessation of Craving

The extinction of craving, *taṇhakkhaya*, stands on a par with various other epithets of *Nibbāna* (SN IV 371). As such, it occurs in a recurrent description of the final goal as the stilling of all formations, *sabba-saṅkhāra-samatha*, the relinquishment of all substrata, *sabbūpadhi-paṭinissagga*, the extinction of craving*, taṇhakkhaya*, dispassion, *virāga*, cessation, *nirodha*, and *Nibbāna* (MN I 436). The same formula recurs also in the *Ariyapariyesana-sutta*, where it forms part of the Buddha's reflection that the extinction of craving as the supreme goal of spiritual endeavours will not easily be appreciated by those who are under the influence of delight and passion (MN I 167).

The complete and remainderless cessation of craving, *taṇhāya asesa-virāga-nirodho*, its giving up and relinquishment, *cāgo paṭinissaggo*, is the theme of the third noble truth, which points out that with the cessation of craving the cessation of *dukkha* is reached. The accomplished ones, who have become free from craving, *vītataṇhā*, have plucked out the darts of existence, *bhava-sallāni* (Dhp 351). Those who in regard to any of the five aggregates are devoid of craving, *vigatataṇhā*, are beyond any form of agitation when these aggregates change and become otherwise (SN III 8). At the same time, they are also beyond any speculative views on the destiny of an awakened one after death (SN IV 387). In fact, for those who are freed through the destruction of craving, *taṇhakkhaya-*

vimuttino, any standpoint for views has been uprooted, *diṭṭhiṭ-ṭhānā samūhatā* (It 48).

The liberation attained through the destruction of craving also implies the highest degree of ethical perfection in early Buddhism. Thus an *arahant*, one who has completely eradicated all forms of craving, is incapable of consciously killing a living being, of taking what has not been given, of engaging in sex, of knowingly speaking falsehood, and of enjoying sensual pleasures by hoarding as is usually done in households (MN I 523).

One who has thus been freed through the destruction of craving, *taṇhakkhaye vimutta*, is reckoned by the wise as a sage (Sn 211). Such a sage rid of craving, *nittaṇhā*, has gone beyond the vision of the world with its gods (Ud 77). Having abandoned craving, *taṇhaṃ pahatvāna*, such a one deserves to be reckoned a true Brahmin (Dhp 416). For such a true Brahmin there is no more questing or searching, just as there is no need to search for a well when water is available all around (Ud 79).

The freedom that results from the destruction of craving yields supreme happiness. According to a verse in the *Udāna*, whether it is the sensual happiness of the world or the divine happiness in heaven, none of them is worth even the sixteenth part of the happiness of the destruction of craving, *taṇhakkhaya-sukha* (Ud 11). Since it is reasonable to give up a smaller happiness, if in this way a greater and superior happiness can be gained (Dhp 290), a true disciple of the Buddha does not delight even in divine pleasures, but delights in the destruction of craving, *taṇhakkhaya-rato hoti* (Dhp 187).

1.5 The Path to Freedom from Craving

The path to freedom from craving is the same as the path to freedom from *dukkha*, namely the noble eightfold path (SN IV

371). More specifically, the path to the destruction of craving can be found in the development of the seven awakening factors, *bojjhaṅga* (SN V 86), and of the four *satipaṭṭhāna*s (SN V 300).

Since craving arises and grows due to perceiving something as gratifying, *assāda*, viewing things as unsatisfactory – by directing attention to their inherent disadvantage and danger, *ādīnava* – leads to diminishing and eventually to eradicating craving. In the case of sensual craving, such craving grows ever more as long as particular aspects of the body are seen as beautiful, *subhānupassino bhiyyo taṇhā pavaḍḍhati* (Dhp 349). Counter-methods for sensual craving would therefore be contemplating aspects of the body that are not beautiful, *asubha*. This could be undertaken by directing mindfulness to the anatomical parts of the body, for example, as described in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* (MN I 57).

The unsatisfactory nature of sensual pleasures is the theme of a series of similes delivered in the *Potaliya-sutta* (MN I 364-366). According to this discourse, to search for satisfaction through sensuality is comparable to a hungry dog that gnaws a meatless bone, or to a bird that has gotten hold of a bit of food but is being attacked by other birds and therefore has to let go of the food again in order to avoid injury. Thirst for sensuality burns, just like a blazing torch held against the wind, or like falling into a burning charcoal pit. Sensual pleasures are illusory like a dream, or like parading with things that are owned by others. To pursue sensual pleasures is dangerous, similar to climbing up a tree in search of fruit, only to find that the tree is being cut down by another person.

Another simile in the *Māgandiya-sutta* compares indulging in sensual pleasures to a leper, who cauterises his wounds over a fire and scratches them, experiencing momentary relief by an act that aggravates his condition. (MN I 507). The chief purpose behind these sometimes stark similes is to aid in the de-

velopment of wisdom that sees craving for sensual satisfaction as futile and meaningless.

To eradicate the mode of craving that is directed to forms of existence, *bhava-taṇhā*, requires the development of deeper insight, *abhiññā* (MN III 289). Such deeper insight would in particular be insight into the illusory nature of the notion “I am”, which is the very basis for any craving for existence. To overcome craving for existence, what has come into being should be seen simply as something that has come into being, *bhūtaṃ bhūtato disvā* (It 44), i.e. as the product of a conditioned process and without imposing any “I” notions on it. Based on such understanding, the task then is to develop detachment and disenchantment. What is required above all is a sober appreciation of the true nature of one’s own existence, and of the ultimately unsatisfactory nature of all forms of existence.

According to an instruction delivered by Ānanda, craving should be overcome by basing oneself on craving, *taṇhaṃ nissāya taṇhā pahātabbā* (AN II 145). As the same discourse explains, based on craving for liberation, other forms of craving can be overcome. The tantalizing use of *taṇhā* in an evidently positive sense in this passage, namely as a term that represents the highest of aspirations – the wish to reach full liberation – is significant. This passage is not unique in its presentation, since the possibility that there can be wholesome forms of craving is also envisaged in the *Nettipakaraṇa*, which distinguishes between wholesome and unwholesome types of craving, *taṇhā duvidhā, kusalā pi akusalā pi* (Nett 87).

Ānanda’s indication that craving can become the very means to overcome craving reveals a gradual procedure, which replaces unwholesome forms of craving and desire with more wholesome counterparts. The central point behind this presentation is to bring out the need for a gradual approach when trying to eradicate craving.

Another aspect of the same dictum is the need to develop wisdom, in the sense that to overcome craving through craving requires a clear distinction between wholesome objects of desire and their unwholesome counterparts. Such wisdom is based on the clear ethical distinction between what is wholesome and what is unwholesome, and is coupled with the insight that the objects of unwholesome cravings are of such nature that they will never yield any lasting or true satisfaction.

The gradual approach that underlies the presentation according to which craving should be overcome through craving thus enjoins a gradual shift of the basic mode of craving and desire from unwholesome to wholesome objects. This gradual approach is based on clear awareness of the fact that the deep-seated tendency to craving can only be overcome through an approach that treats wholesome forms of 'desire' and even 'craving' as tools for progressing on the path to freedom from all desires and cravings. Thus, "release from craving initially relies upon craving for its release" (Matthews 1983: 81).

The difficulties involved in overcoming craving, which make it pertinent that a gradual approach is employed, are reflected in an allegorical manner in the *Cūḷataṇhāsaṅkhaya-sutta*. This discourse reports how Sakka, the king of gods in the Heaven of the Thirty-three, approached the Buddha with the question of how to become liberated through the destruction of craving, *taṇhā-saṅkhaya-vimutta* (MN I 251). The Buddha's poignant reply was that there is nothing worth sticking to, *sabbe dhammā nālaṃ abhinivesāya*.

Yet, for Sakka to be able to put this penetrative maxim into practice was apparently not easy. In fact, after receiving this instruction, Sakka returned to heaven and continued disporting himself with his heavenly maiden in a pleasure pond. It needed the timely intervention of Mahāmoggallāna, who through a feat of supernatural power made the beautiful palace of Sakka shake and tremble, to bring the king of gods to his senses.

This tale allegorically highlights the difficulties of putting the path to freedom from craving into practice, as this requires moving right against the current of satisfying desire, and demands undertaking sustained practice that goes well beyond a mere superficial intellectual appreciation. Yet, every single step that moves against this current, and thereby withstands the attraction of Māra's daughter Taṇhā (SN I 124), is an all-important step in the direction of the true happiness of freedom from craving.

2. Grasping / *Upādāna*

The range of meaning of the term *upādāna* covers two main aspects: In a more active sense, *upādāna* stands for "grasping" or "clinging" (two terms I will use alternatively to render *upādāna*). In a more passive sense, the same term refers to that which is grasped or clung to, in the sense of its "basis" or "substrata", at times also signifying "supply" or "fuel".

Representative of the tendency of the mind to cling or grasp, *upādāna* constitutes the ninth factor in the twelve-link series of dependent arising (*paṭicca samuppāda*), where it arises in dependence on craving and leads on to becoming or existence, *bhava*. As the conditioning force for continued existence, *upādāna* stands for grasping at sensual pleasures, at views, at rules and observances, and at a doctrine of self (MN I 51). In what follows, I will take up each of these four aspects in turn.

2.1 Grasping at Sensual Pleasures

Of the four types of grasping, perhaps the most self-evident manifestation of *upādāna* is clinging to sensual pleasures. The theme of sensual pleasures is given considerable attention in the thought-world of early Buddhism, reflected in the circumstance that the discourses tackle this theme from several related angles.

The lure of sensuality causes the arising of sensual desire, *kāmacchanda*, which constitutes one of the lower fetters that bind beings to continuous migration in the round of existence (DN III 234). The same lure of sensuality is also responsible for sensual lust, which in the form of an underlying tendency, *kāmarāgānusaya*, is already present in a newborn baby (DN III

254). The dire results of craving for sensuality, *kāmataṇhā*, are comparable to the case of a leper who cauterises his wounds over a fire and scratches them: he experiences momentary relief through an act that aggravates his condition (MN I 507). Hence *kāmupādāna*, clinging to sensual pleasures, has a broad compass and its removal is a crucial requirement for being able to progress on the path to liberation.

The first in a series of stark imageries in the *Potaliya-sutta* compares sensual pleasures to meatless bones that are not able to satisfy a dog's hunger, however much the dog may gnaw at them. Another simile in the same discourse describes how a bird has gotten hold of a piece of meat but is immediately attacked by other birds who try to get the same piece of meat as well – the bird will have to let go of its prey quickly to avoid harm and injury. Again, sensual pleasures are like holding a blazing torch against the wind – one inevitably will get scorched; or like being dragged by strong men towards a glowing charcoal pit, with no chance to escape the bitter end of being thrown into this pit. The illusory nature of sensual pleasures are like images seen in a dream; or like borrowed goods with which one may be parading the streets until the owners arrive and force one to return these goods to them. The last image in the *Potaliya-sutta* describes climbing a tree in search of fruit, only to find that someone else is cutting down the tree – one risks severe injury unless one descends quickly (MN I 364).

The predicament that results from sensual pleasures is also taken up in the *Mahādukkhakkhandha-sutta* from a realistic angle. The discourse depicts in detail the toil and suffering often required to make a living, as well as the gruesome consequence of quarrelling and warfare, all of which the discourse presents as results of wanting to satisfy sensual desires (MN I 85).

These images reflect the importance of overcoming clinging to sensual pleasures, a task that requires sustained effort during one's progress on the path to liberation. Yet, besides the demanding task of going beyond the lure of sensuality, other modes of grasping also need to be overcome.

2.2 Grasping at Views

The problems that result from grasping at views, *diṭṭhupādāna*, are a prominent theme in the *Aṭṭhakavagga* of the *Sutta-nipāta*. Thus the *Duṭṭhaṭṭhaka-sutta* highlights that it is attachment to one's own views that makes it so difficult to relinquish them (Sn 781 and 785). According to the *Paramaṭṭhaka-sutta*, the cause for unending quarrelling is none other than high esteem for one's own view and the tendency to consequently look down on any other view (Sn 796-797). As the *Pasūra-sutta* points out, some delight in verbal debate and treat others as fools, hoping to gain victory and fearing defeat (Sn 824-828). Yet, if one were a fool simply by dint of holding a different view, the *Cūlaviyuha-sutta* remarks, then all debating recluses should be reckoned fools (Sn 880 and 890). As the same discourse points out, dogmatic upholding of one's own view is in the end just a manifestation of conceit (Sn 889).

The problem caused by grasping at views is that "the dogmatist wishes to safeguard his view at whatever cost, because the refutation of his views means to him defeat and self degradation" (Premasiri 1972: 21).

Thus it is precisely grasping in the form of identification with a particular view that leads to dogmatic adherence and various measures to protect the view, to unwillingness to let go of it even when faced with compelling evidence. As a discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* explains, due to being bound by views and being obsessed by them, recluses continue to quarrel with each other (AN I 66). Since to hold any view

dogmatically will inevitably lead to conflict with those who have different views, the only real solution is to let go of grasping at views (MN I 499). The need to let go of such grasping might even be of relevance in relation to Buddhist views, in the sense of needing to give up any dogmatic adherence and identification with them.

A problem with this suggestion could appear to be implicit in a passage in the *Cūḷasīhanāda-sutta* (MN I 66). According to this discourse, non-Buddhist recluses and Brahmins had insight into grasping at views. Ñāṇavīra (1987/2001: 481) comments that, since right view is found only in the Buddha's teaching and thus beyond the scope of understanding of non-Buddhist recluses and Brahmins, they could not have insight into grasping at views if such grasping were to include right view.

Yet, the passage in the *Cūḷasīhanāda-sutta* may only intend the problem of grasping at one's own views. That is, insight into grasping at views would not require knowledge of the contents of views held by others. What such insight needs is recognition of the tendency to grasp at one's own view.

Besides, if someone dogmatically asserts his or her position, it would be possible to recognize this attitude as a manifestation of grasping even if one does not fully understand the content of what is being asserted.

Thus the non-Buddhist recluses and Brahmins would be able to understand the problem of grasping at views without needing to understand Buddhist views. That is, the *Cūḷasīhanāda-sutta* need not pose an obstacle to considering the problem of grasping at views as being of relevance even for adherents of Buddhism.

The *Alagaddūpama-sutta* in fact warns against wrongly grasping the Buddha's teaching, which it compares to taking hold of a snake by its tail, instead of seizing it by the neck (MN I 133). Attempting to catch a snake in such an unskilful

way will result in getting bitten. Instead, the same discourse advises, the *Dhamma* should be seen as a raft for crossing over to the shore of liberation (MN I 135), not as something to be clung to for its own sake.

The same pragmatic stance, exemplified in the simile of the raft, would also be relevant to the theme of rules and observances.

2.3 Grasping at Rules and Observances

The implications of the term *sīlabbata*, the object of the third type of grasping, can best be ascertained by turning to the *Kukkuravatika-sutta*. This discourse uses the terms "rule", *sīla*, and "observance", *vata* – which make up the compound *sīlabbata* – in a description of contemporary ascetics that had taken up the rule and observance of behaving like a dog or a cow (MN I 387). The discourse describes that on meeting the Buddha the ascetic who was following the observance of a dog sat down and curled himself up like a dog. The commentary informs us that the other was in the habit of eating grass together with cows. Such and other types of rules and observances were apparently undertaken in ancient India in the belief that they would lead to purification or to rebirth in heaven (cf. e.g. MN I 102).

The task of going beyond grasping at rules and observances, however, appears to have a broader scope than just avoiding such imitation of animals or similar modes of behaviour. In a verse in the *Dhammapada*, Buddhist monks are also encouraged to go beyond rules and observances (Dhp 271). This suggests that this type of grasping can become a problem even for Buddhist monastics. In fact, a discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* points out that rules and observances in themselves can be either wholesome or unwholesome (AN I 225). Thus the problem are not just certain rules and observances as such, but

much rather the act of grasping at or clinging to them in a way that has unwholesome effects.

2.4 Grasping at a Doctrine of Self

Grasping at a doctrine of self, *attavādupādāna*, is according to the *Cūḷasīhanāda-sutta* beyond the ken of other recluses and Brahmins. Though these may recognize the predicament inherent in the other three types of grasping, insight into the problem posed by grasping at a doctrine of self is a unique characteristic of the Buddha's teaching (MN I 67).

The Chinese parallels to the *Cūḷasīhanāda-sutta* differ from the Pāli version in as much as, instead of referring to clinging to "a doctrine of self", they simply speak of clinging to "a self" (T I 463a7; T I 591a22; T II 644a16). The corresponding expression *ātmopādāna* occurs in a Sanskrit fragment parallel to a discourse from the *Nidāna-saṃyutta* (Tripāṭhī 1962: 43).

This alternative reading would considerably broaden the scope of the fourth type of grasping from the upholding of doctrines regarding a self, something that is left behind with stream-entry, to any type of grasping at notions of an 'I', a subtle type of clinging only overcome with the attainment of full awakening.

The notion of grasping at a doctrine of self does in fact result in a problem when considering the gradual removal of grasping that takes place with the various levels of awakening. Grasping at wrong views, grasping at rules and observances and grasping at a doctrine of self are all left behind at stream-entry, when the fetters of doubt, of dogmatic adherence to rules and observances and of personality view are overcome, and when right view has become a matter of personal experience. Grasping at sensuality would be left behind with the attainment of non-return, when the fetter of sensual desire is eradicated.

From this perspective, already a non-returner would have successfully overcome the four types of *upādāna*.

Ñāṇatiloka (1952/1988: 216) highlights this problem, commenting that in this way the "traditional fourfold division of clinging is not quite satisfactory [since this would imply that] the Anāgāmī is entirely free from the ... four kinds of *upādāna*". This is, however, not the case. Several passages refer to the remainder of *upādāna* of a non-returner. Such references occur in the context of depicting a mode of practice that has the potential of leading to non-returning or else to full awakening. In the case of a non-returner, final knowledge here and now is not reached since there is a remainder of *upādāna* left (e.g. MN I 63).

The way the above mentioned Chinese and Sanskrit parallel versions formulate the fourth type of grasping would provide a solution to this problem, as it would include any clinging to a notion of an 'I'. The *anattā* teaching is in fact of continuous relevance beyond the attainment of stream-entry and thus goes further than the denial of a permanent self in the form this was apparently upheld by some of the Buddha's contemporaries. Besides denying such self-notions, contemplation of *anattā* also functions as a meditative strategy for uncovering subtle identifications, in the sense of any form of holding on to a sense of 'I'.

The persistence of such a subtle type of grasping at a sense of 'I' in a non-returner is the theme of the *Khemaka-sutta*. This discourse clarifies that even though a non-returner has certainly realized that none of the five aggregates [affected by] clinging can be reckoned as a self, nevertheless a trace of the sense of 'I' in regard to the five aggregates still remains (SN III 130).

By way of illustration, the discourse describes a dirty and soiled cloth that has been cleaned with the help of cleaning salt, lye and cow dung. After being rinsed in water the cloth

has become clean, yet, a remainder of the smell of the cleaning salt, lye and cow dung still pervades the cloth. Hence even though the cloth is already clean, to complete the process of purification it still needs to be kept in a perfumed casket until this last remnant of smell has also disappeared.

Another simile in the same discourse illustrates how a subtle clinging to a sense of 'I' can remain even when the not-self nature of each of the five aggregates has been well realized. For this purpose, the discourse takes up the example of the scent of a lotus. Just as the sense of 'I' remains even though it cannot be identified as belonging to any of the five aggregates, so too the scent of a lotus cannot be identified as belonging to the petals or the stalk or the pistils, as it belongs to the flower as a whole (SN III 130).

That even the most subtle sense of an 'I' should be reckoned as a form of grasping comes to the fore in another simile that forms part of a penetrative instruction which led to the stream-entry of Ānanda (SN III 105). According to this instruction, the sense of 'I' arises only when there is grasping, just as it is only by grasping a mirror that one is able to see one's own face. Ñāṇananda (2004: 217) explains that "when one looks into a mirror ... one suddenly becomes self-conscious ... one gets the notion 'this is me' ... the moment one looks into a mirror one is suddenly reminded of it, as if to exclaim: 'Ah, here I am!'"

What is grasped or clung to, according to this discourse, are none other than the five aggregates of bodily form, feeling, perception, volitional formations and consciousness. This leads me on to another important perspective on *upādāna*, namely its role in relation to the "five aggregates of clinging", or perhaps better the "five aggregates [affected by] clinging".

2.5 The Five Aggregates [Affected by] Clinging

The significance of *upādāna* in relation to the five aggregates is reflected in the standard definition of the first noble truth, according to which the five aggregates [affected by] clinging are the succinct manifestation of the truth of *dukkha*. This is the case to such an extent that one discourse even dispenses with the other specifications usually given, according to which birth, old age, death etc. are *dukkha*. Instead of mentioning these, this discourse simply states that the five aggregates [affected by] clinging are the first noble truth (SN V 425).

The eminent role of grasping in this respect is also reflected in some shortened versions of dependent arising that start off directly with *upādāna*, without mentioning the preceding eight links, and then continue the chain of dependent arising with the remaining links of the series (e.g. MN I 511 or SN III 14).

The *Cūḷavedalla-sutta* clarifies that clinging is not the same as the five aggregates [affected by] clinging, nor is it something apart from them. Rather, clinging stands for desire and lust in regard to them (MN I 300). Another discourse introduces the five aggregates as "things that can be clung to", again explaining that desire and lust are what is meant by the term 'clinging' in this context (SN III 167). This would make it clear that the expression *pañc'upādānakkhandhā* refers to five aggregates as the objects of clinging. In fact, aggregates such as the body would in themselves not be able to cling or grasp, hence my rendering of the expression *pañc'upādānakkhandhā* as "five aggregates [affected by] clinging".

Without such clinging, what is left are the bare five aggregates. The *Khandhā-sutta* in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* explains that the "five aggregates" and the "five aggregates [affected by] clinging" cover the same ground, namely any possible instance of bodily form, feeling, perception, volitional formations and

consciousness (SN III 47). What makes the difference between them is the presence or absence of clinging.

From this it would follow that once an arahant has destroyed clinging or grasping, his or her five aggregates can be considered as bare aggregates, because he or she no longer grasps at them.

A problem with this interpretation could seem to be a discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya*, according to which a worldling or any of the four types of noble ones should engage in the same mode of contemplation that reviews the five aggregates [affected by] clinging from a variety of perspectives, such as impermanence, etc. (SN III 167). The instruction given in each instance, even in the case of an arahant, speaks of contemplating the five aggregates [affected by] clinging. This appears to imply that even the aggregates of an arahant are five aggregates [affected by] clinging, not just the five bare aggregates (Bodhi 1976: 94).

Yet, the instruction speaks throughout of "these" five aggregates [affected by] clinging, without providing a direct grammatical relation to the different type of noble ones it mentions. Hence it would perhaps be more natural to interpret this passage as referring to the five aggregates [affected by] clinging of the monk to whom the discourse is given, who had come for instructions on how to progress on the path. That is, this discourse need not be interpreted as contradicting the assumption that an arahant has only the bare five aggregates, as all clinging and grasping at them has been removed.

2.6 Grasping and *Nibbāna*

Another passage of relevance to the theme of grasping and the status of an arahant can be found in the *Itivuttaka*, which distinguishes between the "element of *Nibbāna* with a residue remaining", *sa-upādisesā nibbānadhātu*, and the "element of

Nibbāna without residue" (It 38). The "element of *Nibbāna* with a residue remaining" stands for an arahant who is still alive. The "element of *Nibbāna* without residue remaining" refers to the passing away of an arahant. This much can be seen from the verses that accompany this discourse, which qualify the latter as being related to the future, when all forms of existence cease.

To appreciate the implications of the distinction drawn in this discourse, it needs to be born in mind that the term *upādāna* can also have the sense of a "basis", "substrata", "supply" or "fuel". This sense comes to the fore in the context of a fire simile in a discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya*, which indicates that fire burns only as long as it has some fuel for burning, *sa-upādāna*, not without such fuel, *anupādāna* (SN IV 399). The imagery is telling, since it is by 'grasping' its *upādāna*, its fuel, that fire continues to burn.

A similar sense also underlies the expression *sa-upādisesa* in the context of a simile that describes a doctor who treats a wound caused by a poisoned arrow (MN II 257). Here *sa-upādisesa* refers to a "residue" of poison left in the wound.

Applied to the case of the *Itivuttaka* passage quoted above, the expression *sa-upādisesā nibbānadhātu*, the "element of *Nibbāna* with a residue remaining", thus indicates that the residue of the five aggregates is still in existence. Though this residue is the product of former clinging, it continues in existence even when clinging itself has already been removed. This particular context thus differs from the usage of the qualification *sa-upādisesa* in relation to a non-returner, where it does imply a remainder of clinging (e.g. MN I 63: *sati vā upādisese anāgāmitā*).

2.7 Freedom from Grasping

A prominent method for developing freedom from grasping takes the five aggregates [affected by] clinging as its object. This mode of contemplation focuses on their impermanent nature in particular, that is on their arising and passing away. Practising in this way establishes an increasing inner distance towards one's own tendency to grasp at them (AN III 32).

Contemplating the rise and fall of the five aggregates is given considerable prominence in the discourses as a form of meditation that issues in awakening (Gethin 1992: 56). This may well be the reason why teachings regarding this form of meditation practice are reckoned the Buddha's lion's roar of instruction (SN III 85). The same form of contemplation features among the mindfulness practices described in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* (MN I 61).

According to the *Aggivacchagotta-sutta*, the Buddha's aloofness from views, *diṭṭhi*, was the direct outcome of his having seen, *diṭṭhaṃ*, the rise and fall of the five aggregates [affected by] clinging (MN I 486). Even the former Buddha Vipassī reached awakening by contemplating the rise and fall of the five aggregates [affected by] clinging (DN II 35).

The potential of this practice lies in its tendency directly to undermine all clinging to a sense of 'I' (MN III 115). Once the sense of an 'I' that lurks behind the five aggregates [affected by] clinging has been fully understood and abandoned, they stand, as it were, with their root cut off (Thī 106). This root is none other than desire for them (SN III 100).

In contrast, by seeking gratification in things that can be clung to or grasped at, craving will continue to grow. This is simply a natural consequence, just as a fire will burn ever more when additional fuel is added to it, or as a tree will grow as long as it is well nourished through its roots (SN II 85 and SN

II 87). In short, one who grasps is thereby bound by Māra (SN III 73).

Due to grasping at a world that is but the product of the six senses, one becomes subject to affliction (Sn 169). Such grasping is the condition for becoming and thus for the perpetuation of *dukkha* (Sn 742). Only those who realize that grasping is fearful will reach liberation through not clinging, (AN I 142), attaining the internal freedom of having destroyed all grasping (SN II 54). To reach the destruction of all clinging requires letting go even of the most sublime type of experience, such as the attainment of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, which can be reckoned supreme among objects of grasping (MN II 265).

Hence practising mindfully one should dwell free from any dependencies and from clinging to anything in the world (MN I 56). In particular at the time of death it is of considerable importance to avoid grasping at any aspect of experience, be this any of the sense-doors or their objects, any element or meditative experience, this world or another (MN III 259). Freedom from clinging is freedom from agitation and will issue in liberation (MN I 67). One who has reached final liberation has thereby fully understood the nature of grasping (SN IV 33). In fact, the total absence of clinging and grasping is the final goal itself.

"[Having] nothing, clinging [to nothing] ...
This I call *Nibbāna*." (Sn 1094).

3. Passion / *Rāga*

The Pāli term *rāga* stands for "lust" or "passion". Together with anger, *dosa*, and delusion, *moha*, passion is one of the fundamental defilements recognized in early Buddhism. Here *rāga* stands for "a state of lack, need and want. It is always seeking fulfilment ... but its drive is inherently insatiable, and thus as long as it endures it maintains the sense of lack" (Ñāṇaponika 1986: 4).

In the present chapter, I will at first examine the nature of passion (2.1), followed by turning to the removal of passion (2.2) and to the significance of "dispassion", *virāga* (2.3).

3.1 The Nature of Passion

Passion features prominently in the second noble truth, according to which the entire range of the human predicament can be traced to craving, which is accompanied by "passion", *rāga*, and delight, *taṇhā nandirāgasahagatā* (SN V 421). *Rāga* has moreover received the dubious honour of being reckoned as one of the daughters of Māra, together with Craving and Discontent (SN I 124). This highlights the importance and detrimental repercussions of this particular mental defilement, and its close relationship to the problem of craving.

When passion arises in the mind, one becomes unable to discern what constitutes one's own and another's welfare, a predicament that easily leads to evil conduct by way of body, speech and mind (AN I 215). Passion in the form of sensual passion, *kāmarāga*, causes householders to quarrel with each other, while passion manifesting as passionate attachment to

views, *diṭṭhirāga*, will cause recluses to quarrel with each other (AN I 66). Such passionate attachment stands at the back of much philosophical speculation, which in the final count can be traced to the presence of passion in regard to the five aggregates (SN IV 387).

Once sensual passion, *kāmarāga*, is present in the mind, one of its consequences is forgetfulness, as passion makes it difficult to keep things in mind even though they have been repeatedly memorized (SN V 121). The debilitating influence of passion not only impairs memory, but also perception. Beings not free from passion in relation to sensual pleasures suffer from a perceptual distortion, *viparītasaññā*, which causes them to attribute happiness to what on sober inspection turns out to fall short of providing true happiness (MN I 507).

The deluded notions that result from the influence of passion on the mind are as illusory as the images of a woman or a man created by a painter - however real they may seem, they remain artificially created images (SN II 101). Though such notions are illusory, their repercussions are all too real, as passion can set the whole mind on fire (SN I 188). No other fire, indeed, is comparable to the fire of passion (Dhp 202).

A monk or a nun who goes begging for food without sense-restraint, or who is given to excessive socialization, can easily be overwhelmed by passion, tormenting them to such an extent that they might commit an offence or disrobe (AN III 95 and AN III 393). The degree to which passion can lead to mental distress can be inferred from the case of the nun Sīhā, who was driven to the verge of suicide because for years sensual passion, *kāmarāga*, prevented her from getting any peace of mind (Thī 77-81).

Sensual passion, *kāmarāga*, is responsible for the arising of fear and dread not only in regard to the present, but also in regard to the future (AN IV 289). Fear in regard to the present

moment arises when one retires to a secluded spot in the forest with a mind under the influence of passion (MN I 17). Fear in regard to the future arises when one is afflicted by some disease and fear of death manifests, a fear transcended only by those who are free from passion in relation to sensual pleasures (AN II 173).

In view of these manifold disadvantages, it comes as no surprise that the removal of passion is a central concern of the Buddha's teaching. In telling contrast to the present and future predicament caused by passion stands the happiness incumbent on gaining freedom from lust and passion. Such happiness constitutes the peak of unworldly happiness, *nirāmisā nirāmisataraṃ sukhaṃ* (SN IV 237). This may not seem obvious at first sight, since from a worldly perspective a man might imagine happiness to be found in staying in the company of beautiful women in a lavishly furnished dwelling place. Yet, due to his passion such a man will experience bodily and mental torments and suffering (AN I 136). Once he has overcome passion, in contrast, he will be free from such torments and live happily, even if he stays out in the open, subject to the vicissitudes of the climate and with only the hard ground to rest on.

A close inspection of the Buddha's behaviour and way of acting, undertaken by a young Brahmin in the *Brahmāyu-sutta*, resulted in the following telling observation: the Buddha took food experiencing its taste, yet without experiencing passion for the taste, *rasapaṭisaṃvedī ... no ca rasarāgapaṭisaṃvedī* (MN II 138). This highlights that the problem posed by passion is not solved by simply avoiding experience, but rather needs to be tackled on a deeper level. One who has succeeded in tackling passion at this deeper level is able to fully experience sense-objects without giving any room to mental reactions and associations under the influence of passion and desires.

Just as when two oxen are yoked together, neither of the two oxen is responsible for the other being bound, so too neither

the sense-organs nor the sense-objects are responsible for bondage, since desire and passion, *chandarāga*, are what fetters (SN IV 163).

The important and variegated repercussions of passion find their reflection in the inclusion of *rāga* in various central categories of early Buddhism. One of these categories describes the *saṃyojana*s, the "fetters" that bind beings to *saṃsār*ic existence. Here passion makes its appearance as "sensual passion", *kāmarāga*, the first of the five lower fetters (MN I 433). Once sensual passion has been transcended, one's future rebirth will similarly surpass the sensuous sphere (SN II 99). Passion recurs in the context of the fetters, *saṃyojana*, where it is directed to the material and immaterial spheres, *rūparāga* and *arūparāga*, two out of the five higher fetters (DN III 234). Alternative enumerations of the fetters speak also of the "fetter of passion for existence", *bhavarāgasaṃyojana* (AN IV 7).

Another of these categories lists the "four [types of] bonds", *cattāro yogā*, where passion underlies three out of the four (AN II 10). These three are the bondage to sensuality due to sensual passion, *kāmarāga*; the bondage to existence due to passion for existence, *bhavarāga*; and the bondage of views as a manifestation of passion for views, *diṭṭhirāga*.

The image of being bound recurs again with the five types of mental bondages, *cetaso vinibandhā*, which undermine the inspiration to practice and thereby prevent growth in the *Dhamma* (MN I 101). Three out of this set of five are manifestations of *rāga* in the form of passion in relation to sensual pleasures, in relation to the body and in relation to forms. A metaphor in the *Dhammapada* sums up these various perspectives on the bondage caused by passion: to be under the influence of passion is a predicament comparable to a spider caught in his own net (Dhp 347).

Another important category in early Buddhism is concerned with the *anusaya*s, the "underlying tendencies" that lie latent in the mind and lead to the arising of defilements. Here passion makes its appearance in two out of seven cases (DN III 254): as the underlying tendency to sensual passion, *kāmarāgānusaya*, and as the underlying tendency to passion for existence, *bhavarāgānusaya*. The underlying tendency to sensual passion is already present in the case of a newborn baby, even though an infant would not yet be able to conceive the idea of sensuality (MN I 433).

The activation of passion as an underlying tendency is closely linked to the arising of pleasant feelings. This relation, however, is not one of necessity, since some pleasant feelings, such as those experienced in meditative absorption, *jhāna*, do not activate this underlying tendency (MN I 303). In relation to more mundane types of pleasant feelings, however, a sustained effort needs to be made to move beyond the influence of this underlying tendency.

A manifestation of passion which may not pertain to the realm of what is unwholesome could be *dhammarāga*, "passion for the *Dhamma*". This term makes its appearance in instances where someone fails to reach full liberation and, due to such *dhammarāga*, he or she gains non-return (MN I 350). The way these instances are formulated seems to allow for two explanations. One could either take *dhammarāga* to be the factor that has prevented attaining full liberation, or else to be the factor that has ensured at least the gain of non-return.

The commentarial explanation supports the first alternative, understanding *dhammarāga* to represent *chandarāga*, "lustful longing" in relation to one's meditative experiences (Ps III 146). This interpretation did, apparently, not remain unchallenged. The same commentary records the argument that on following this interpretation an unwholesome mental factor is

made responsible for leading to such sublime attainment as non-return and its consequent rebirth in the Pure Abodes.

Such a problem could be avoided with the alternative interpretation. On adopting this alternative understanding, just as there could be wholesome forms of craving, *taṇhā*, in the form of craving for liberation, so too could there be wholesome forms of passion, *rāga*, once such craving or passion is directed towards wholesome objectives.

Be that as it may, a mental factor entirely in the realm of what is unwholesome is *adhammarāga*, "unlawful passion", an expression which according to the *Atthasālinī* refers to incestuous lust (As 366). The *Cakkavattisīhanāda-sutta* reckons that such *adhammarāga* is characteristic of periods when human civilization is on the decline (DN III 70). Another discourse describes the dire consequences of indulging in *adhammarāga*, which apparently not only causes the arising of quarrels and fighting, but can also lead to adverse climatic conditions and an increase in demonic forces (AN I 160).

3.2 The Removal of Passion

Contemplation of the mind in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* (MN I 59) directs mindfulness to the task of recognizing the presence or absence of any form of passion. Such introspective recognition of the presence or the absence of passion in the mind shows that the Buddha's instructions are a directly and immediately visible teaching, which invites one to come and see, leading onwards and to be experienced personally by the wise (SN IV 41)

Compared with "anger", *dosa*, passion is less blameable, though it takes longer to be overcome (AN I 200). The arising of passion can be traced to two main conditions: the "sign of beauty", *subhanimitta*, often attributed to the physical body of the other gender, and "unwise attention", *ayoniso manasikāra*

(AN I 87). The obvious counter method, therefore, is wise attention to the less appealing aspects of the body, examining its anatomical constitution and the unattractive nature of its parts (AN III 323). Additional counter strategies include developing restraint of the senses, contentment with food, wakefulness and mindfulness together with clear comprehension (AN IV 166).

In order to ensure that one's mind is not overwhelmed by passion, recollection of the Buddha, the *Dhamma* and the *Saṅgha* can be undertaken (AN III 286). From among the four divine abodes, *brahmavihāra*, the meditative development of equanimity as a liberation of the mind, *upekkhā cetovimutti*, stands out as an "escape", *nissaraṇa*, from passion (DN III 249).

These passages indicate that the development of mental tranquillity, *samatha*, can also function as an antidote to passion. This point is made explicitly in a discourse in the *Aṅguttaranikāya*, which indicates that to develop tranquillity leads to developing the mind, whereby passion will be eradicated, *samatho bhāvito ... cittaṃ bhāvīyati, cittaṃ bhāvitaṃ ... yo rāgo so pahīyati* (AN I 61).

The rationale behind this passage is that the experience of deeper states of concentration is accompanied by intense pleasure and happiness, brought about by purely mental means, thereby automatically eclipsing any happiness that arises in dependence on sensual pleasures. Thus the development of mental tranquillity can become a powerful antidote to passion by divesting its objects of their former attraction.

3.3 Passion and Dispassion

The term *rāga* is derived from the root *raj*, "to colour", and can also mean "colour" or "dye". *Rāga* occurs in this sense in a passage in the *Vinaya* which reports a group of notoriously ill

behaved monks using "face colour", *mukharāga*, apparently an ancient Indian type of makeup (Vin II 107).

The two meanings of *rāga* are to some extent interrelated, since *rāga* as passion or lust is a mental quality that "colours" the mind. The discourses illustrate this colouring influence of sensual passion, *kāmarāga*, with the example of someone attempting to see the reflection of his or her face in water mixed with dye (SN V 121). Due to the presence of the dye, the natural mirroring function of the water is distorted, making it impossible to properly see the reflection of one's face.

The alternative sense of *rāga* as colour becomes particularly evident with the term *virāga*, which depending on context can either mean "fading away", derived from the sense of decolouration, or else "dispassion", derived from the primary sense of *rāga* as lust or passion. These two senses of *virāga* can to some extent be related to each other, since contemplating the "fading away" and therewith the impermanent nature of phenomena will result in "dispassion". A play on both senses of the term can be found in such instances as when the purpose of the Buddha's teaching is declared to be *rāgavirāga*, the "fading away of passion" (SN IV 47).

The scope and relevance of these two aspects of the term *virāga* as "fading away" and as "dispassion" can best be exemplified through a survey of occurrences of *virāga* in a series of different contexts.

The idea of "fading away" appears to be more prominent in contexts where *virāga* is preceded by "impermanence" and followed by "cessation" and "relinquishment", *nirodha* and *paṭinissagga*, as is the case with the final four steps of mindfulness of breathing (MN III 83). Alternatively, *virāga* can also be preceded by "impermanence" and "change", *anicca* and *vipariṇāma*. This perspective is applied, for example, to the five aggre-

gates (SN III 43). Here, too, "fading away" appears to fit the context best.

The same idea of "fading away" would also be prominent when *virāga* is preceded by *khaya*, "destruction". This is the case, for example, in a description of how the mind is freed by the destruction and fading away of craving, *taṇhā ... khayā virāgā ... cittaṃ suvimuttaṃ* (SN III 13). Quite often *virāga* is preceded by "destruction" and "decay", *khaya* and *vaya*. These three qualifications could be applied to the three types of feelings (e.g. MN I 500); to the five aggregates (SN III 24); to the twelve links of dependent arising, *paṭicca samuppāda* (SN II 26); to the knowledge of the fixedness of the principle of dependent arising, *dhammaṭṭhitiñāṇa* (SN II 60); or else they could be part of a contemplation capable of leading to final liberation (AN IV 146). In all these instances, the sense of "fading away" appears to be the prominent meaning.

Alternatively *virāga* can be preceded by "removal", *pahāna*. In such cases, the sense of "dispassion" seems to be the more prominent meaning. These two terms occur in relation to five "perceptions that ripen in liberation", *vimuttiparipācaniya saññā* (DN III 243); in relation to five things whose development leads to liberation of the mind and liberation by wisdom (AN III 85); and in relation to overcoming a whole host of defilements (AN III 277). A list of nine perceptions whose development is of great fruit also culminates in "perception of removal" and "perception of dispassion", *pahāna-saññā* and *virāga-sañña* (AN IV 387).

In numerous instances, "removal" and "dispassion" are followed by "cessation", *nirodha*, a triad that occurs frequently in listings of types of perception. Examples are the six "perceptions conducive to penetration", *nibbedha-bhāgiya-saññā* (DN III 251); which are at the same time six "things conducive to knowledge", *vijjābhāgiyā dhammā* (SN V 345 and AN III 334); and six things that lead to the removal of various defile-

ments (AN III 452). Another example are the seven "things that prevent decline", *aparihāniyā dhammā* (DN II 79 and AN IV 24); which are seven perceptions (DN III 253) whose development leads to overcoming all kinds of defilements (AN IV 148); and which therefore are "things to be aroused", *dhammā uppādetabbā* (DN III 283).

The theme of "things to be aroused" recurs also in a ninefold and a ten-fold formulation (DN III 289 and DN III 291), both of which should be developed to overcome various defilements (AN IV 465 and AN V 309). The triad "removal, dispassion, cessation" also features in a list of ten perceptions that are of great fruit, which the mind should be well familiarized with (AN V 105 and AN V 107); and in a long list of meditation topics whose development is highly recommended, even if only done for a short time (AN I 41; see also SN V 132).

In most of these listings, the triad "removal, dispassion, cessation", *pahāna*, *virāga*, *nirodha*, is preceded by the triad "impermanent, unsatisfactory, not-self", *anicca, dukkha, anattā*, or by a set of terms that, in addition to impermanence and not-self, may involve the absence of beauty, *asubha*, or "disadvantage", *ādīnava*, etc.

In sum, when *virāga* is preceded by terminology related to impermanence alone, its predominant sense appears to be that of "fading away". When, however, *virāga* is preceded by "removal", often in contexts that also refer to unsatisfactoriness and to not-self, then the sense of "dispassion" appears to be most prominent.

Such "dispassion" is thus the outcome of a full appreciation of the true nature of reality, preceded by "removal", *pahāna*, and almost always followed by "cessation", *nirodha*. The triad "removal, dispassion, cessation" thus forms a counterpart to the triad "impermanent, unsatisfactory, not-self", *anicca, duk-*

kha, anattā. While these three are the main characteristics of reality that need to be understood with insight, the triad "removal, dispassion, cessation" depicts the detachment that ensues once insight into the three characteristics matures.

The sequence underlying the insight triad "impermanent, unsatisfactory, not-self" is significant, since one leads to another. Thus based on awareness of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness is appreciated. Based on appreciation of unsatisfactoriness in turn, insight into not-self arises. This dynamic becomes evident in a recurring sequence that proceeds from awareness of impermanence to viewing the unsatisfactory quality of what is impermanent, followed by recognizing the selfless nature of what is unsatisfactory, *aniccasaññā, anicce dukkhasaññā, dukkhe anattasaññā* (e.g. AN III 85).

Similarly, in the case of the affective triad "removal, dispassion, cessation" a progression can be discerned. This progression moves from the more active "removal" to the experience of "dispassion", which then reaches its culminating point in "cessation".

A more detailed explanation of the implications of these three can be culled from the *Girimānanda-sutta* (AN V 110). According to this discourse, "perception of removal", *pahānasaññā* requires not indulging in any thought related to sensuality, anger and harming. "Perception of dispassion" and "perception of cessation", *virāga-saññā* and *nirodha-saññā*, then stand for inclining the mind towards the final goal by reflecting in accordance with the maxim that "this is peaceful, this is excellent, namely the stilling of all formations, the relinquishment of all substrata, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, *Nibbāna*", *etaṃ santaṃ etaṃ paṇītaṃ, yadidaṃ sabbasaṅkhārasamatho sabbupadhipaṭinissaggo taṇhakkhayo virāgo nirodho nibbānaṃ*. The only difference is that in the case of perception of dispassion, the maxim does not mention "ces-

sation"; and in the case of perception of cessation, "dispassion" is not mentioned.

This suggests that the last two perceptions are similar in meaning. Perhaps "cessation" represents a slightly more definite and final form of leaving behind attachment to the world and of inclining the mind towards *Nibbāna* than perception of dispassion. The preceding perception of removal, however, clearly sets in at a more gross level, when unwholesome thoughts are still to be overcome. Their removal would then be the basis for inclining the mind towards the peacefulness of *Nibbāna* in accordance with the above maxim.

The topic of *Nibbāna* is also prominent in another series of terms that include *virāga*. This series of terms qualifies a type of teaching or conduct as leading to disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, peace, higher insight, awakening and *Nibbāna*, *nibbidāya virāgāya nirodhāya upasamāya abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya saṃvattati* (e.g. DN I 189). The point made by this qualification is that such teaching or conduct is capable of leading to liberation. This thus depicts the outcome of dispassion, namely inner peace, higher insight and awakening. Together with disenchantment, dispassion and cessation are the essential steps that lead to final liberation (e.g. SN III 163).

The relationship between dispassion and disenchantment, *nibbidā*, is taken up in a discourse in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*. The discourse points out that dispassion, *virāga*, has disenchantment as its proximate cause (SN II 30). The same discourse continues by indicating that liberation has *virāga* as its proximate cause. That is, the whole purpose of dispassion is liberation, *virāgo vimuttattho* (SN III 189), or knowledge and vision of liberation, *virāgo vimuttiñāṇadassanattho* (AN V 312). Conversely, without dispassion it is impossible to reach knowledge and vision of liberation (AN V 314). Hence it is through

dispassion that one reaches liberation, *virāgā vimuccati* (e.g. MN I 139).

The mental factors particularly required for reaching final liberation are the factors of awakening, *bojjhaṅga*, and in relation to these *virāga* also makes an appearance. For the seven factors of awakening to lead to knowledge and liberation, they need to be practiced in dependence on seclusion, 'dispassion' and cessation, so that they will culminate in letting go, *vivekanissita, virāganissita, nirodhanissita, vossaggapariṇāmin* (MN III 88). The same set of four is of relevance not only in relation to the seven factors of awakening, but also for the development of the five faculties or powers (e.g. SN IV 365), and in relation to the noble eightfold path (e.g. SN V 45).The final goal to be reached by this noble eightfold path, *Nibbāna*, is but the destruction of lust or passion, *rāga*, and its allied evils of anger and delusion (SN IV 251). Hence *virāga* is one of the epithets of *Nibbāna* (DN II 36).

When once asked to point out a cause for the purification of beings, according to a discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* the Buddha explained that this can be found in dispassion, *virāga* (SN III 70). Another discourse indicates that whatever leads to dispassion should be considered as the Buddha's teaching (AN IV 280). Hence those who have confidence in dispassion have confidence in the highest and will gain the highest profit (It 88).

Again, those who teach the overcoming of passion and its allied evils are speakers of *Dhamma*, *dhammavādī*; those who practice for the overcoming of passion are practising well, *suppaṭipanna*; and those who have overcome passion are "well-gone" indeed, *sugata* (SN IV 252). Of all things or phenomena, dispassion stands out as supreme (AN II 34).

In sum, then, dispassion can be seen to comprise in a nutshell the whole gamut of the *Dhamma*, covering the path to be taken

as well as the goal to be reached. As a path to be taken, *virāga* counteracts the chief culprits for the *saṃsār*ic predicament: passion, desire and craving. Their hold on the mind will gradually be reduced by seeing all the enticing aspects of experience for what they truly are. By allowing their attraction to 'fade away', their superficially colourful appearance is 'decoloured'.

The central means for such decolouration or fading away is sustained awareness of their impermanent nature. Such direct experience of the impermanent nature of all aspects of experience needs to be complemented by a clear apprehension of the other two characteristics, unsatisfactoriness and not-self, in order to culminate in 'dispassion'. With the onset of true dispassion the path gains momentum, leading from the gradual 'fading away' of 'passion', *rāgavirāga*, in regard to any aspect of experience, to a thorough 'fading away' and disappearance of all aspects of experience with the attainment of stream-entry.

This first experience of the supramundane, of *Nibbāna*, at stream-entry then becomes the most thorough 'fading away' possible. Here even the sense of 'I' that otherwise pervades all experiences has to yield to such 'fading away', and therewith all identifications are similarly subject to 'decolouration'. At this stage, *virāga* in its supreme sense as an epithet for the final goal has become an experienced reality. With progress to the higher stages of awakening, *virāga* will further unfold its 'dispassioning' potential. For the *arahant*, then, *virāga* has become so all-encompassing that any trace of sensual passion and any passion for self or existence has been forever turned into 'dispassion'. In this way, the mind of an *arahant* has been totally 'decoloured' of the colouring forces of unwholesome states and tendencies.

"Highest of all paths is the eightfold [noble path],
And of all truths the four-part [noble truth],
Highest of [all] phenomena is dispassion,
And of two-footed [humans] the one with vision."

Maggān' aṭṭhaṅgiko seṭṭho,
saccānaṃ caturo padā,
virāgo seṭṭho dhammānaṃ,
dipadānañca cakkhumā (Dhp 273).

4. Ill-will / *Vyāpāda*

The negative repercussions of ill-will, *vyāpāda* or *byāpāda*, are treated from a set of related angles in the Pāli discourses, where ill-will makes its appearance in a number of categories that describe unwholesome states or tendencies. The present chapter will begin by surveying manifestations of ill-will among these categories (4.1), followed by turning to its arising (4.2) and to the way to overcome ill-will (4.3).

4.1 Manifestations of Ill-will

4.1a Ill-will as a Form of Wrong Intention

Ill-will is one of the three types of wrong intention, which are the "intention of sensuality", *kāmasaṅkappa*, the "intention of ill-will", *vyāpādasaṅkappa*, and the "intention of harming", *vihiṃsāsaṅkappa* (e.g. MN III 73). These three types of intention stand in direct opposition to progress on the path to liberation. Their counterparts - intention of renunciation, non-ill-will and harmlessness - constitute right intention as part of the noble eightfold path.

It is noteworthy that in this three-fold listing "harming" should stand beside "ill-will", even though the two would seem to be closely related to each other. The reason for this could be the emphasis on non-violence, *ahiṃsā*, among ancient Indian recluses and wanderers.

A similar concern is reflected in a *Vinaya* regulation, according to which it is not appropriate for Buddhist monastics to partake of meat that is killed deliberately for them (Vin I 238).

Other *Vinaya* regulations protect plant life and even microbic beings in water, reflecting a concern with not harming living beings prevalent among contemporary recluses and ascetics. Such rules prohibit digging soil, cutting plants, and pouring out or making use of water that contains living beings (Vin IV 32; Vin IV 34; Vin IV 49; Vin IV 125).

The same concern also extends to the laity. In fact the very first precept to be undertaken by a lay Buddhist is to refrain from killing any living being (Khp 1, for monastics see Vin IV 124). This shows the degree to which abstention from harming was seen as an integral aspect of proper conduct among early Buddhists.

As the above instances show, not all of actions considered as harmful would necessarily be an expression of overt ill-will. Thus perhaps the need to take intentional harm into account stands at the background of the fact that the discourses distinguish between three types of wrong intention, placing ill-will side by side with harming.

A mind free from the three types of wrong intention, then, is a mind of pure or undisturbed intentions, *anāvilasaṅkappa* (AN V 31). To stay free from ill-will and maintain harmlessness is of such importance to progress on the path that it can be compared to the weaponry of a war chariot (SN V 6). Hence the *Sallekha-sutta* enjoins that, though others may be full of ill-will, one should make a determined effort to remain free from it oneself (MN I 42).

4.1b Ill-will as an Underlying Tendency

Vyāpāda is the last in a set of five underlying tendencies, *anusaya*, described in the *Mahāmaluṅkya-sutta* (MN I 433). In this particular instance, *vyāpāda* replaces the more usual "irritation", *paṭigha*, found in the standard listing of seven underlying tendencies (e.g. DN III 254).

The *Mahāmaluṅkya-sutta* explains that a small infant already has an underlying tendency to ill-will. This is so even though a newborn child would not yet have the perception of a 'being', making it impossible for ill-will against other beings to actually arise in the child (MN I 433).

Thus ill-will is part of the basic emotional set up of unawakened beings, independent of whether one is already mature enough to experience actual manifestations of ill-will.

4.1c Ill-will as a Fetter

Vyāpāda is also the last of the five lower fetters, *orambhāgiya saṃyojana* (DN III 234). These five lower fetters quite literally fetter mankind to transmigration in those realms of *saṃsāra* still related to sensuality.

While the first three lower fetters are overcome with the attainment of stream-entry, the fetter of sensuality and the fetter of ill-will are only left behind with non-return. Though the total removal of the last traces of ill-will thus takes place at a rather advanced stage of progress along the path, to tackle its grosser manifestations is already incumbent on the beginning phases of practice.

4.1d Ill-will as a Pathway of Action

In a listing of ten pathways of action, *kammapatha*, ill-will comes as the ninth in the series, preceded by covetousness. The *Sāleyyaka-sutta* explains that such ill-will involves the wish for other beings to be killed, slaughtered, annihilated, destroyed, and come to be non-existent (MN I 287).

This series of wishes reflects the degree to which ill-will can narrow down one's perception of someone as the sole culprit responsible for a problematic situation, leading to the assumption that to eliminate this person is the only viable solution. As

a pathway of action, such ill-will is a way of undertaking things that is bound to result in future *dukkha* (MN I 313).

4.1e Ill-will as a Bodily Tie

In a group of four bodily ties, *kāyagantha*, ill-will occupies the second position (DN III 230). In this listing ill-will comes after covetousness, *abhijjhā*, which also precedes it in the ten pathways of action and which is similar in kind to the sensual desire, *kāmarāga*, that precedes ill-will in the listings of wrong intentions, underlying tendencies and lower fetters. This pattern also recurs in relation to occurrences of ill-will in another two schemes, namely the hindrances and the mental defilements, where ill-will again follows sensual desires or the related covetousness.

This recurrent pattern of listing ill-will after sensual desire or covetousness need not be a matter of chance, but could point to an underlying relationship between the two. Both are comparatively gross defilements of the mind that need to be overcome in order to progress on the path. The two are also to some extent related to each other, in as much as ill-will easily arises as a consequence of frustrated desire.

This is reflected in an analysis given in the *Sakkapañha-sutta*. This discourse takes up the question of why beings who wish to be free from ill-will nevertheless succumb to it (DN II 276). In an intriguing analysis of a series of conditions, the *Sakkapañha-sutta* traces the arising of ill-will to selfishness, holding things as dear, desires, thoughts and conceptual proliferations. The way out of this predicament, according to the same discourse, is to pursue only such types of joy, *somanassa*, that do not have unwholesome consequences. Hence ill-will does indeed seem to stand in a close relationship to desires.

4.1f Ill-will as a Mental Corruption

Ill-will comes in second place after covetousness in the context of a whole series of mental corruptions or defilements, *upakkilesa*, listed in the *Vatthūpama-sutta* (MN I 36). The *Vatthūpama-sutta* compares the presence of any of these mental corruptions to stains that make it impossible to properly dye a piece of cloth. According to the *Cūḷa-assapura-sutta*, as long as ill-will is not brought under control, a monk is not really engaging in the path that makes him worthy of being reckoned a recluse, *samaṇa* (MN I 281).

The same is illustrated in a discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya*. This discourse indicates that a monk, who by going forth has already lost out on the possible enjoyment of a householder, also misses out on becoming a true recluse if he allows himself to be under the influence of ill-will. His predicament is comparable to a piece of wood from a funeral pyre that is burnt at both ends and smeared with dung in the middle, therefore being in a condition where it cannot be put to any other use whatsoever (SN III 93).

4.1g Ill-will as a Hindrance

Ill-will is also the second of the five hindrances (e.g. DN III 234), where it comes after sensual desire, *kāmacchanda*, or in some alternative listings after covetousness, *abhijjhā*. As a hindrance, ill-will could be either "internal", in the sense of arising within oneself, or else "external", in the sense of being present in others (SN V 110). Both aspects deserve attention. Not only is one's own ill-will blameworthy, but also encouraging or approving of ill-will in others should be avoided (AN I 299). Another aspect of the distinction between external and internal manifestations of ill-will may be related to its objects, in that ill-will could not only be directed to others, but can also manifest as self-hatred.

A set of similes describes the nature of the hindrances with the example of a bowl full of water, which is used as a mirror to see the reflection of one's face. Here ill-will is similar to the water being heated up and boiling (SN V 122 and AN III 231). Such a condition would make it impossible to use the water as a mirror. The imagery of boiling water aptly illustrates the effect of ill-will on the mind, an effect reflected also in the common parlance that someone is 'boiling with anger'. Ill-will and anger quite literally heat up the mind. Moreover, one who succumbs to this hindrance is in a predicament similar to boiling water, which needs to be handled with extreme care in order to avoid it spilling over and harming those who stand close to it.

Another simile compares the presence of the hindrance of ill-will in the mind to copper as a corruption of gold. Due to such corruption, the gold will be brittle and unfit for use by the goldsmith, as it has lost its malleability and radiance (SN V 92 and AN III 16). This image reveals the loss of workability of the mind due to the presence of ill-will. A similar idea underlies another image, in which a strangling fig encircles a tree, bends it and eventually splits it apart (SN V 96). Just as such a creeper weakens the tree it overgrows, so too the hindrance of ill-will, if it is allowed to overgrow the mind, weakens and eventually destroys wisdom.

In contrast, the mental condition when ill-will has at least temporarily been overcome is comparable to recovery from a physical illness (MN I 275). According to the *Samaṇamaṇḍika-sutta*, intentions related to ill-will cease completely with *jhāna* attainment (MN II 27). The *Visuddhimagga* explains that it is in particular the *jhāna* factor of "joy", *pīti*, which stands in direct opposition to ill-will (Vism 141).

4.2 The Arising and Consequences of Ill-will

A prominent cause for the arising of ill-will is unwise attention to the sign of irritation, *paṭighanimitta* (AN I 3). Once ill-

will has arisen, the mind tends to return again and again to the particular issue, event or person that has occasioned the arising of ill-will. In this way, the "sign of irritation" can become quite literally the "nutriment", *āhāra*, for ill-will (SN V 64), in that it nourishes the continuity of ill-will.

Based on the presence of the "element of ill-will" in one's mind, *vyāpādadhātu*, perceptions related to ill-will arise, *vyāpādasaññā* (SN II 151). These in turn lead to intentions, desires, fevers and quests under the influence of ill-will, *vyāpādasaṅkappa, vyāpādacchanda, vyāpādapariḷāha, vyāpādapariyesanā*. The final results of this conditioned sequence are bound to be misdeeds by body, speech and mind, influenced by ill-will.

The presence of ill-will in the mind obstructs knowing what is beneficial for oneself and for others (AN III 63), and recalling what has been memorized even for a long time (SN V 122). According to the *Cūḷakammavibhaṅga-sutta*, ill-will and anger are the cause of being reborn ugly, or even of being reborn in hell (MN III 204). The future karmic results of ill-will reflect the effect that ill-will has even here and now. An angry face, distorted by the tension of ill-will, is inevitably an ugly face, and one overwhelmed by ill-will is on fire within, not altogether different from the way ancient Indians imagined the conditions in some of the hell realms.

The *Lakkhaṇa-sutta* provides a complementary perspective on the karmic consequences of ill-will, as it indicates that, due to being free from anger and ill-will during previous existences, the Buddha was endowed with a beautiful complexion and a skin resembling gold (DN III 159). The degree to which the absence of ill-will can affect countenance is also reflected in a passage in the *Mahāsaccaka-sutta*. According to this passage, the debater Saccaka was rather surprised to find that, when being addressed offensively, the Buddha's skin would brighten and his countenance became clear (MN I 250).

Thus someone who does not react with ill-will and anger will not only be reborn endowed with beauty, but even be more beautiful here and now. The face of one who is forgiving, kind and patient, as illustrated in the *Mahāsaccaka-sutta*, will naturally become more beautiful.

However, beauty is not the main reason why one should avoid ill-will. A more serious consequence of being overwhelmed by ill-will is that one will do what one should not do and fail to do what should be done (AN II 67). The dire consequences of allowing ill-will to remain in the mind are that its influence leads to words and deeds driven by ill-will (AN I 262). This is comparable to a house whose roof is not properly thatched, a condition that will affect the peak, the roof beams and the walls of the house.

To withdraw into solitude in a forest will be of little benefit for someone who is still under the influence of ill-will (MN I 18). In fact, to meditate with the mind overwhelmed by the hindrance of ill-will is a form of 'mis-meditating', a way of practice that did not meet with the Buddha's approval (MN III 14). The repercussions of ill-will are such that they can even contribute to a gradual deterioration of living conditions in general. Thus, according to the *Cakkavattisīhanāda-sutta*, it is only when beings decide to leave ill-will and other unwholesome actions and mental conditions behind that, after a long period of continual decline, living conditions in the world begin to improve again (DN III 74).

4.3 How to Overcome Ill-will

An important foundation for overcoming ill-will is moral conduct. By keeping the five precepts incumbent on a lay-follower of Buddhism one gives a gift of fearlessness, non-anger and non-ill-will to other beings, *abhayaṃ deti averaṃ deti avyāpajjhaṃ deti* (AN IV 246).

In order to overcome thoughts of ill-will, perceptions of ill-will, or the element of ill-will, one needs to simply develop thoughts of non-ill-will, perceptions of non-ill-will and the element of non-ill-will (AN III 446). To undertake this task, an important prerequisite is a clear recognition of the presence of ill-will in the mind. The *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* describes such clear recognition as a first step of practice. This then leads to insight into what has caused the arising of this hindrance, insight into what will effect its removal, and insight into how a future arising of ill-will can be prevented (MN I 60).

The first aspect in the instruction given in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* - clear recognition of the presence of ill-will - is of considerable importance. Instead of immediately reacting, the task is to allow mindfulness the time and space to clearly recognize that ill-will is present in the mind, and to see what has caused its arising. It is only when this first step of clearly assessing the situation has been carried to its completion that removal of ill-will comes in its proper place.

This two-step approach is highlighted in the *Itivuttaka* as a characteristic quality of the Buddha's teaching, which requires first of all recognizing evil as evil, *pāpaṃ pāpakato passatha*, followed by overcoming it (It 33). Such overcoming, then, is the task of right effort, namely to arouse energy and strive in order to overcome any ill-will and prevent its re-arising (e.g. MN II 11).

Though the second step of removing ill-will should certainly not be neglected, by doing so too quickly one would miss an opportunity to develop experiential wisdom when ill-will arises in the mind. Since such wisdom will eventually lead to the total removal of ill-will, from a long-term perspective it is of considerable importance that the initial mindful observation of ill-will is given full space. This implies to clearly recognize how the presence of ill-will manifests, and ideally also understanding the conditions that have led to its arising. Such insight

needs to be allowed the space and time to unfold its liberating potential before more active measures are taken.

For the actual removal of ill-will, the above-mentioned comparison of a mind free from ill-will to recovery from physical disease provides a helpful example (MN I 275). Together with the listing of ill-will as a bodily tie, *kāyagantha*, this draws attention to the bodily tension and quite literal 'dis-ease' that the arising of ill-will and anger can bring about. Such bodily tension and the mental boiling up of ill-will naturally tend to augment each other. Thus, at times, this vicious circle can be slowed down already by just consciously relaxing the body and by taking a deep breath. Shortness of breath, clenching of teeth and tensing of shoulders are easily detectable bodily indicators of the presence of ill-will, and to consciously counteract them by relaxation can have remarkable effects on one's mental condition.

Intentional relaxation can also have substantial results if applied directly to the mind itself. Here the point is that ill-will inevitably involves a narrow perspective, usually a focussing on the irritating and displeasing aspect of a situation or a person at the exclusion of other aspects that do not reinforce the irritation. This narrow vision can escalate so much that, as described in the context of ill-will as a pathway of action, the only possible solution seems to be getting rid of the irritating person or object.

Here a conscious broadening of the scope of perception can go a long way in undermining the foundations of ill-will. The aspect of broadening the mind comes up explicitly in a description of how ill-will in regard to disagreeable sense objects leads to a narrow state of mind, *appiyarūpe rūpe vyāpajjati ... parittacetaso* (MN I 266). If, however, covetousness and ill-will are overcome, then the mind becomes broad and boundless, *abhijjhā pi vyāpādā pi ... tesaṃ pahānā aparittañca me cittaṃ bhavissati, appamāṇaṃ subhāvitaṃ* (MN II 262).

True broadening of the mind comes about through the development of loving kindness, *mettā*, whose meditative radiation is quite literally "boundless", *appamāṇa*, as well as being free from anger and ill-will, *avera* and *avyāpajjha* (e.g. DN I 251). Through the development of loving kindness, ill-will can indeed be removed, *mettaṃ ... bhāvayato yo vyāpādo so pahīyissati* (MN I 424). As a verse in the *Itivuttaka* indicates, for those who are under the influence of ill-will, who burn with the fire of anger, the way to extinguish this fire is through loving kindness (It 92-93). Loving kindness is in fact the antidote par excellence for ill-will, so much so that it is impossible for ill-will to invade and persist in a mind that has developed loving kindness (DN III 248).

Additional tools for overcoming ill-will include consciously ignoring the negative qualities of a person that is experienced as irritating, and instead directing attention to whatever positive qualities can be found in him or her (AN III 186). In case one is unable to find anything positive, then the occasion has come for developing compassion, *karuṇā*, as a person bereft of any positive quality should indeed call up one's compassion and pity. In addition to loving kindness and compassion, equanimity can help to overcome irritation, or else trying to forget the issue that has caused irritation, or reflecting on the fact that all beings are the heirs of their own deeds (AN III 185).

In addition to loving kindness and reflection on the karmic consequences of one's deeds, the Pāli commentaries recommend practising wise reflection repeatedly, associating with good friends, and having suitable conversations as means for overcoming ill-will (Ps I 283). The reference to associating with good friends receives a complementary perspective in a discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya*, which points out that those who are under the influence of ill-will tend to associate with others who have the same mental inclination (SN II 168).

Hence associating with those who are free from ill-will will support one's own struggle against ill-will.

For one who has reached final liberation, ill-will has forever been left behind, and the Tathāgata is one who delights in the absence of ill-will (It 31). As the *Jīvaka-sutta* points out, the Buddha's establishment in loving kindness was well grounded indeed, since he had forever eradicated any defilement of the mind that might lead to ill-will (MN I 369).

"A monk who dwells in loving kindness,
And is devoted to the Buddha's teaching,
Shall attain the path of peace,
The happiness of the calming of [all] formations."

Mettāvihārī yo bhikkhu
pasanno Buddhasāsane
adhigacche padaṃ santaṃ
saṅkhārūpasamaṃ sukhaṃ.

(Dhp 368)

5. Sloth-and-torpor / *Thīnamiddha*

Sloth-and-torpor is the third in the standard listing of the five hindrances, those detrimental mental states singled out for their propensity to 'hinder' the proper functioning of the mind (DN I 246). The present chapter will first survey the nature of this hindrance (5.1) and then turn to the removal of sloth-and-torpor (5.2).

5.1 The Nature of Sloth-and-torpor

The discourses indicate that the hindrance of sloth-and-torpor can arise due to discontent, boredom, laziness, overeating, and because of a depressed state of mind (SN V 64). The effect of the hindrance sloth-and-torpor can be illustrated with the example of a bowl full of water, used as a mirror in order to see the reflection of one's face (SN V 121and AN III 232). If the water in the bowl should be overgrown with moss, the natural reflecting ability of the water will be impaired. Similarly, if the mind is 'overgrown' with sloth-and-torpor, its natural ability to function properly will be impaired.

Additionally, the same image also depicts quite vividly that the long-term result of sloth-and-torpor is stagnation, similar to water overgrown by moss. In contrast to this predicament, to be free from sloth-and-torpor is like being released from a prison (MN I 275). This complementary simile reflects the degree to which sloth-and-torpor 'imprison' the mind.

The *Vibhaṅga*, the second and perhaps earliest work in the Pāli *Abhidhamma*, explains sloth-and-torpor to imply "inability" or "unreadiness" (Vibh 254). Similar to this aspect of in-

ability, a discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* characterizes a mind under the influence of sloth-and-torpor as "internally stuck", *ajjhattaṃ saṅkhittaṃ* (SN V 279).

Sloth-and-torpor, though counting as only one out of the five hindrances, in actual fact covers two distinct mental factors. This distinction is drawn in a discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya*, which differentiates between sloth and torpor as single hindrances (SN V 110). These two distinct mental factors may have been subsumed under the heading of a single hindrance due to their similar effect on the mind.

The *Vibhaṅga* explains that while sloth, *thīna*, is a mental type of inability, *cittassa akalyatā*, torpor, *middha*, refers to its bodily counterpart, *kāyassa akalyatā* (Vibh 254). Torpor as a form of bodily inability is reflected in a verse in the *Dhammapada*. This verse relates overeating out of gluttony to the arising of torpor, *middha*, a deplorable condition comparable to a fat pig wallowing and lolling about (Dhp 325). Elsewhere the Pāli discourses depict someone who, after overeating, indulges in the pleasure of lying down and sleeping, *passasukha* and *seyyasukha*, and thus in the pleasure of torpor, *middhasukha* (DN III 238). A striking contrast to this is provided by a verse in the *Theragāthā*, according to which Anuruddha completely overcame torpor through adopting the ascetic practice of not lying down (Th 904).

This may have been an exceptional case, however, not representing the norm for *arahant*s in general. In fact, torpor as bodily fatigue can arise without being caused by overeating or any other form of improper indulgence. The *Mahāsaccaka-sutta* reports an occasion when the Buddha was challenged by a contemporary debater for taking a nap in the afternoon. In reply, the Buddha clarified that his taking a rest should not be misinterpreted as a manifestation of delusion (MN I 250).

The *Peṭakopadesa* explicitly remarks that the bodily fatigue of an *arahant* should not be reckoned a hindrance (Peṭ 161). The *Milindapañha* lists torpor among those conditions that simply accompany the body and which are outside of the control of an *arahant* in general (Mil 253). From this perspective, the case of Anuruddha would indeed seem to have been exceptional. The *Vimuttimagga* then includes torpor among types of derived matter (T XXXII 445c25, with a Tibetan counterpart in Skilling 1994: 189), a reckoning the *Visuddhimagga*, however, does not accept (Vism 450).

In sum, whereas *thīna* as mental sloth stands for conditions of boredom, lack of inspiration and interest, *middha* as torpor seems to have a more ambivalent nature, as sleepiness could be due to overeating, but may also simply come about as a natural condition that will even affect those who have otherwise gone beyond the influence of any of the five hindrances.

5.2 The Removal of Sloth-and-torpor

A prominent antidote to sloth-and-torpor, mentioned on frequent occasions in the Pāli discourses, is the development of "perception of light", *ālokasaññā*, together with mindfulness and clear comprehension (e.g. DN I 71). Some discourses associate the expression "perception of light" with a mind that is "open", *vivaṭa*, and "uncovered", *apariyonaddha*, by day and by night, and indicate that such "perception of light" will lead to knowledge and vision (DN III 223). This suggests the expression "perception of light" to refer to the development of mental clarity.

Such a way of understanding finds support in the *Vibhaṅga*, which glosses "perception of light" as a perception that is "open", *vivaṭa*, "pure", *parisuddha*, and "clean", *pariyodāta* (Vibh 254). The commentaries, however, take the expression "perception of light" more literally and suggest employing ac-

tual light to overcome this hindrance, by looking at the moon, for example, or at the sun (Ps I 284).

Such “perception of light” takes place with the aid of mindfulness and clear comprehension, which brings into play two qualities as a remedy against sloth-and-torpor that indeed lead to an increase of mental clarity. This is not the only role mindfulness has to play in relation to the hindrance of sloth-and-torpor. According to the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*, the tasks of mindfulness in relation to this hindrance ranges from clear recognition of the presence or absence of sloth-and-torpor to understanding what has lead to the arising of this hindrance, what will lead to its removal, and how a future arising of sloth-and-torpor can be prevented (MN I 60).

The *Aṅguttara-nikāya* dedicates an entire discourse to discussing the hindrance torpor, *middha*, offering a variety of remedies (AN IV 85). Initially, one could attempt to counter torpor by changing one’s meditation subject, or else by reflecting on or reciting passages from the Buddha’s teachings. Should this not work, one may pull the ears, massage the body, get up, sprinkle the eyes with water and look up at the sky. If torpor still persists, walking meditation should be practised.

According to the *Visuddhimagga*, the hindrance sloth-and-torpor stands in direct opposition to the *jhāna* factor of initial mental application, *vitakka* (Vism 141). The intention of this explanation could be that the clear grasp of an object through initial mental application counteracts the lack of clarity and mental fogginess caused by sloth-and-torpor. Initial mental application as a *jhāna* factor provides a directional and energizing input and could be understood to be an expression of the quality of energy. Energy is in fact the one of the seven factors of awakening, *bojjhaṅga*, which, according to the Pāli discourses, stands in direct opposition to sloth-and-torpor (SN V 104-105).

The need to energetically overcome and remove this particular hindrance should not be underestimated, since the presence of sloth-and-torpor in the mind obstructs understanding one's own good and that of others (AN III 63). Due to sloth-and-torpor, one does what one should not do and fails to do what should be done (AN II 67).

Being excessively affected by sloth-and-torpor is a factor indicating that a monk may be living the celibate life without real inner satisfaction (SN III 106). To withdraw into solitude in the forest will be of little benefit if one is still under the influence of sloth-and-torpor (MN I 18). Hence to meditate while the hindrance sloth-and-torpor pervades the mind is a form of mis-meditating (MN III 14). Being under the influence of sloth-and-torpor is to be under Māra's control (Ud 38). As long as sloth-and-torpor is present in the mind, liberation will remain out of reach (AN V 195).

The opposition between sloth-and-torpor and liberation finds a fitting illustration in the case of the monk Bhagu (Th 271-274). According to his own report, Bhagu had decided to go out of his dwelling because he was overwhelmed by torpor. His torpor must have been quite strong since, when stepping out, he stumbled and fell down. Getting up and collecting himself, he took to walking meditation. Continuing to practice walking meditation with firm determination, he was not only able to free himself from torpor and develop concentration, but on that same occasion he carried his practice all the way through to liberation.

Hence the removal of sloth-and-torpor has considerable potential, and to properly understand this hindrance and the way to overcome it can yield remarkable results.

6. Restlessness-and-worry / *Uddhaccakukkucca*

Restlessness-and-worry comes as the fourth in the standard listing of the five hindrances that obstruct the meditative development of the mind. Just as in the case of sloth-and-torpor, the expression *uddhacca-kukkucca* actually covers two hindrances, one of which is restlessness, while the other is worry (SN V 110). The rationale for treating them together as a single hindrance may be the similar effect that restlessness and worry have on the mind.

In the present chapter, I will at first examine restlessness (6.1), then worry (6.2), and finally turn to passages that are of relevance to both considered together as the hindrance of restlessness-and-worry (6.3).

6.1 Restlessness

Uddhacca is "restlessness" in the sense of mental agitation, distraction and excitement, and thus by its very nature is the opposite of mental calm and tranquillity.

Restlessness can arise through excessive striving. The discourses compare such a situation to a goldsmith who keeps blowing on gold that is placed on a fire, as a result of which the gold will get burnt (AN I 257). Here a less pushy approach would be the appropriate remedy, and perhaps also a less goal-oriented attitude. In fact, the discourses indicate explicitly that "desire" for progress on the path can be in excess, *atipaggahīta chanda,* and in such a case will cause restlessness (SN V 277). The same is the case for excess of energy. Hence, even though desire for progress and energy are required for the develop-

ment of the path, if they become too prominent in the mind the hindrance of restlessness will arise and thereby obstruct further progress. As long as restlessness remains, it will be impossible to reach the final goal (AN III 421).

The need for balance in this respect can be seen from the case of Soṇa, described in a discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*. After putting forth excessive effort, Soṇa was in a state of depression because he had not progressed. In order to drive home the lesson that the all important middle path of balance gets lost with too pushy an attitude, the Buddha employed the imagery of a lute, an instrument with which Soṇa would have been familiar from his earlier life as a layman (AN III 375).

Though the strings of a lute need to be taut in order to produce sound, if they are over tight, the sound will become shrill. Just as the lute's strings need to be adjusted to a middle position between laxity and tension, similarly Soṇa had to find the middle point of balance between these two extremes in order to progress. In his case, this required giving up excessive striving and its resultant restlessness. After this clarification, Soṇa was soon enough able to reach the final goal, which earlier had eluded him due to his excessive striving.

A more mundane source for the arising of restlessness can be the speaking of provocative words (AN IV 87). Such words easily result in much talking and arguing, as a consequence of which restlessness will arise in the mind and concentration will be lost. Restlessness could also arise in relation to begging alms, as on receiving nothing because people have been too busy to notice that someone has come, a monk or a nun might become restless and wonder who caused a rift between them and their supporters (AN IV 87).

The presence of restlessness makes it difficult to develop the inspiration to visit noble ones and hear their teachings, and also to overcome a fault-finding disposition (AN V 148). Rest-

lessness is a blemish to be avoided by one who dwells in forest seclusion (MN I 470); as to be obsessed by restlessness will cause decline in the teaching and discipline proclaimed by the Tathāgata (AN V 163). Hence a monastic should regularly reflect in order to ascertain if restlessness is present in the mind (AN V 93). If this is the case, a firm effort should be made to overcome it. A central means for overcoming restlessness is the practice of mental tranquillity, *samatha* (AN III 449).

Besides being one of the five hindrances, *uddhacca* is also the fourth of the five higher fetters (DN III 234). Since the five higher fetters are overcome during progress from non-return to *arahant*-ship, the total removal of the last and most subtle traces of restlessness will only take place when final liberation is attained.

A noteworthy usage of *uddhacca* occurs in the *Yuganaddha-sutta*, which refers to restlessness in its description of one of the ways to attain final liberation (AN II 157). According to this discourse, progress to liberation can take place starting with a situation where one's mind is under the influence of restlessness related to the *Dhamma*, *dhamm'uddhacca*. Once the mind settles down and becomes concentrated, the path will be experienced.

The commentary on this passage and the *Paṭisambhidhāmagga* explain that this description refers to the arising of illumination, *obhāsa*, one of the imperfections of insight (Mp III 143 and Paṭis II 100). Not understanding this to be an imperfection and failing to notice its impermanent nature leads to the arising of restlessness. An alternative interpretation is to take *dhamm'uddhacca* to stand for "mental distress brought on by eagerness to realize the *Dhamma*, a state of spiritual anxiety that sometimes can precipitate an instantaneous enlightenment experience" (Ñāṇaponika & Bodhi 2000: 295 note 69), such as apparently was the case with Bāhiya (Ud 8).

6.2 Worry

Due to its close relation to deeds and omissions, the theme of worry is a recurrent topic in the *Vinaya*. The background stories to numerous rules report that monks were experiencing worry in regard to certain actions, and would only undertake them after receiving explicit permission by the Buddha. Worry in this respect was apparently such a common phenomena that some monks deliberately would try to arouse worry in others. Hence a regulation had to be promulgated to stop such mischief (Vin IV 149). The relatively frequent arising of worry among monastics is also reflected in the circumstance that one of the qualifications for acting as a preceptor for other monks, or for giving dependence to junior monks, is an elder monk's ability to dispel worries in a rightful manner (AN V 72 and 73).

Not all worry, however, is something to be dispelled, since at times worry may be quite appropriate. Just as for those who worry about unnecessary things the influxes (*āsavā*) grow, so too the influxes grow in the case of those who do not worry about things that should be worried about (AN I 85). The worry that arose in the monk Sudinna after he had engaged in sex with his former wife was quite appropriate (Vin III 19), in fact it would have been better if worry had arisen earlier and prevented him from committing this deed. But even in regard to minor matters worry would be appropriate. Thus a monk was aroused by worry to approach the Buddha and make a formal confession that on an earlier occasion, when the Buddha had emphasized the importance of observing the precepts, this monk had disapprovingly thought to himself that the Buddha was too exacting (AN I 237).

A verse in the *Sutta-nipāta* relates the removal of worry to the diligent practice of meditation in secluded spots (Sn 925). Another verse in the same collection mentions freedom from worry together with various aspects of restraint in regard to

speech, which cover being free from anger, boasting and arrogance, as well as the use of moderate words (Sn 850). Though these verses do not establish an explicit relation between the removal of worry and these other qualities, the fact that they are presented together is suggestive. One would indeed expect that the inner certitude gained through meditating in seclusion and through observing such restraint in regard to speech would go a long way in preventing the arising of worry.

At times, worry can also stand for uncertainty in regard to the teachings. This is the case in a discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya*, which reports how the Buddha visited a monk and inquired whether that monk had any worries (SN IV 46; cf. also SN III 120; SN III 125 and SN IV 48). The monk replied that he indeed had considerable worries, but clarified that nothing blameworthy in regard to ethics had happened for which he would have felt regret. Questioned on the source of his worry, the monk then asked for clarification on some subtler aspect of the teaching. In such instances "worry", *kukkucca*, is no longer related to moral regret, but instead stands for a type of worry that is concerned with the wish to properly understand the teachings, a case perhaps similar to the above mentioned "restlessness" related to the teachings, *dhamm'uddhacca*.

6.3 Restlessness-and-worry

A telling illustration of the agitating effect of restlessness-and-worry on the mind describes how one might attempt to see the reflection of one's own face in a bowl filled with water that is stirred by wind. The wind creates ripples and waves, making it impossible to properly see the reflection of one's face (SN V 123 and AN III 232). Similarly, the hindrance of restlessness-and-worry stirs the mind and causes such mental ripples and waves that to see and know according to reality becomes impossible. Moreover, just as water stirred by wind may easily overspill its container, similarly restlessness-and-worry can

easily 'overspill', affecting anyone in the vicinity with an atmosphere of agitation and unsettledness.

A rather stark depiction of the effect that restlessness-and-worry can have on one's mental freedom is provided in the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta*, which compares being under the influence of this particular hindrance to slavery, a condition where one is utterly dependent on others and unable to go where one would like (DN I 72). This image draws out the degree to which the hindrance of restlessness-and-worry can control the mind and keep it in its grip, throwing it into endless activity and agitation, thereby making it dependent on externals as inner stability has been lost.

Another simile compares the presence of the five hindrances to various metals that corrupt the purity of gold. Here restlessness-and-worry corresponds to lead, whose presence will cause the gold to become corrupted, brittle and unfit for being employed by a goldsmith, as it has lost its malleability and radiance (SN V 92 and AN III 16). In a similar way, due to the influence of restlessness-and-worry the mind becomes unfit for work. Once restlessness-and-worry are present in the mind, one becomes unable to recognize one's own benefit or that of others, and also unable to keep in mind even what has been memorized for a long time (SN V 123).

To overcome the hindrance of restlessness-and-worry requires developing a mind that is internally calm, *ajjhattaṃ vūpasanta citta* (e.g. DN I 71). The hindrance of restlessness-and-worry thus stands in particular opposition to the awakening factor of tranquillity, *passaddhisambojjhaṅga* (SN V 104). Other awakening factors whose development is recommendable when the mind is restless are concentration and equanimity (SN V 114). In this way, restlessness can gradually be overcome, similar to throwing water and earth on a great fire in order to extinguish it.

The need to remove restlessness-and-worry can arise even at a comparatively high level of development. This can be seen in a discourse that records an instruction given by Sāriputta to Anuruddha. The latter had complained to Sāriputta that in spite of being in the possession of unshaken energy, well-established mindfulness, bodily tranquillity and mental one-pointedness, he was unable to reach liberation from the influxes, *āsavā* (AN I 282). In reply, Sāriputta dryly remarked that Anuruddha's obsession with having energy, mindfulness, tranquillity and one-pointedness of mind was simply a manifestation of restlessness, and his concern about not having reached the destruction of the influxes was simply worry. Being helped to recognize how restlessness and worry were obstructing him in this way, Anuruddha was soon enough able to accomplish the decisive breakthrough to final liberation.

7. Doubt / *Vicikicchā*

Doubt is a mental obstruction in regard to the development of tranquillity as well as of liberating insight. The role of doubt as an obstruction to the development of deeper states of concentration is reflected in its inclusion as the fifth among the five hindrances (e.g. DN I 246). The debilitating effect of doubt in relation to liberating insight, its 'binding' force to *saṃsāra*, finds its expression in the fact that one of the three fetters that are to be eradicated with stream-entry is the fetter of doubt (e.g. MN I 9). These two aspects of the 'hindering' and 'binding' forces of doubt underline the importance of properly understanding the nature of this particular mental condition and the ways to overcome it.

In the present chapter, I will at first examine the nature of doubt, especially through relying on various similes related to the term (7.1). Then I will turn to the distinct Buddhist approach to overcome doubt through developing the mental quality of investigation (7.2).

7.1 The Nature of Doubt

The nature of doubt has been illustrated in the discourses with the help of various similes. One of these introduces doubt as the seventh army of Māra, the Evil One (Sn 437). Those who successfully do battle with this army and overcome doubt are, according to the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta*, comparable to someone who safely crosses a dangerous desert without loss (DN I 73).

Similar to the desert image, doubt in relation to the teacher, the *Dhamma*, the *Saṅgha* and the training is reckoned to be a "barrenness of the mind", *cetokhila* (MN I 101). The theme of travelling that underlies the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta* simile of crossing a desert recurs in a discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya*, which illustrates the nature of doubt with the example of a man who stands at the junction of a forked path, *dvidhāpatha* (SN III 108; see also MN I 144), in need of being told which path to take.

The images of having to cross a dangerous desert and of being unable to decide on the right path disclose the insecurity and vacillation caused by doubt, and the uncertainty about the proper course to be undertaken. The desert imagery and the idea of a barrenness of the mind add to this the aspect of an almost sterile and infertile condition, since due to the presence of doubt the mind becomes unproductive and even profound teachings are like seeds that fall on stony ground.

The lack of clarity and vagueness that underlies the image of a forked path recurs more explicitly in a simile that compares the effect of each of the five hindrances to attempting to see the reflection of one's own face in a bowl filled with water. Here doubt is equivalent to using a bowl that is placed in the dark and filled with turbid and muddy water (SN V 123 and AN III 233). Obviously a bowl of water in such condition will be incapable of accurately reflecting the true condition of one's face, just as a mind under the influence of doubt is unable to accurately know and see the true nature of reality.

The image of turbid and muddy water as an illustration of the clouding and blurring effect that doubt has on the mind finds a counterpart in another simile that compares the five hindrances to various metals that corrupt the purity of gold. In the context of this simile, doubt corresponds to silver. The presence of silver will render gold brittle and unfit for use by the goldsmith,

since by being mixed with silver it loses its malleability (SN V 92 and AN III 16).

As a hindrance, doubt can manifest in relation to internal as well as external phenomena (SN V 110). Moreover, doubt can arise in regard to the past, the present, or the future (DN III 217; cf. also SN IV 327).

The underlying tendency responsible for the fetter of doubt is already present in a new-born baby, even though an infant would not even know things about which doubt could arise (MN I 433). Hence to overcome and remove doubt requires working against a deeply ingrained tendency in the mind.

Not all forms of doubt, however, are blameworthy. In fact, according to some discourses the Buddha at times approved of doubt, telling his auditors that they were entertaining doubt in regard to matters that are indeed perplexing, *kaṅkhaniye ca pana te ṭhāne vicikicchā uppannā* (SN IV 350; SN IV 399; AN I 189). According to the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*, even during the last moments before his passing away the Buddha encouraged the assembled monks to voice any doubt they had, so that it could be clarified as long as he was still alive (DN II 155). Just prior to that statement, the Buddha had resolved the doubts of the wanderer Subhadda (DN II 149). Thus, although the arising of doubt is an obstruction to deeper concentration and insight, it can have its rightful place when it leads to investigating matters that should be investigated.

7.2 Doubt and Investigation

Giving unwise attention to phenomena that cause doubt is the main factor or 'nutriment' that leads to the manifestation of doubt (SN V 103). "Unwise attention", *ayoniso manasikāra*, is in fact the condition par excellence for the arising of doubt (AN I 4). Its opposite, "wise attention" or perhaps "penetrative attention", *yoniso manasikāra*, should be directed to distin-

guishing between what is wholesome and unwholesome, what is blameable and blameless, what is inferior and superior, what is dark and bright. To understand this crucial difference constitutes the antidote or "denourishment", *anāhāra*, for doubt (SN V 106).

The above shows that the hindrance of doubt is closely related to an inability to clearly recognize what is skilful or wholesome, *kusala*, and what is unskilful or unwholesome, *akusala*. This is noteworthy in so far as the central factor or 'nutriment' for the awakening factor of investigation-of-phenomena, *dhammavicaya-sambojjhaṅga*, is precisely wise attention directed to what is wholesome and unwholesome, what is blameable and blameless, what is inferior and superior, what is dark and bright (SN V 104).

This contrast between the hindrance of doubt and the awakening factor of investigation-of-phenomena, where the same factor that overcomes the former is responsible for the development of the latter, is quite significant. It reveals that in early Buddhism doubt is not to be overcome through faith or belief alone. Rather, to overcome and counter doubt requires a process of investigation, and due to the clarity and understanding that arises through such investigation, doubt is dispelled.

According to the detailed treatment of the awakening factors given in the *Ānāpānasati-sutta*, the awakening factor of investigation-of-phenomena arises based on the previous development of mindfulness (MN III 85). This suggests that the type of investigation required to overcome doubt stands in close relation to mindfulness, in the sense of 'investigating' with awareness the true nature of 'phenomena'. In fact, *satipaṭṭhāna* is explicitly qualified to be a "straightforward" and "direct" path, *ekāyano maggo* (MN I 55), an expression explained in the commentary to imply that *satipaṭṭhāna* is not a forked path, *eka-maggo ayaṃ, na dvedhā-patha-bhūto* (Ps I 229). Thus the

development of mindfulness would indeed seem the appropriate method for overcoming the forked path of doubt.

Another facet of the same awakening factor is a more theoretical type of inquiry. This can be seen from the definition given in the same *Ānāpānasati-sutta*, according to which the development of the awakening factor of investigation-of-phenomena, *dhammavicaya-sambojjhaṅga*, requires examining with wisdom "that *Dhamma*", *taṃ dhammaṃ paññāya pavicinati pavicarati parivīmaṃsaṃ āpajjati* (MN III 85). The use of the singular form suggests that the inquiry is concerned with *dhamma* in the sense of the "teaching" or the "truth".

The procedure to settle doubt through inquiry is described in several discourses, which depict how junior monks approach experienced elders to get clarification of their questions in order to remove their doubts (e.g. MN I 223). A case that well illustrates how inquiry can lead to overcoming doubt is described in the *Sakkapañha-sutta*. This discourse reports how the king of the Heaven of the Thirty-three, Sakka, approached the Buddha with a set of questions during what appears to have been their first personal meeting (DN II 269). After receiving a series of clarifying replies to his queries from the Buddha, Sakka proclaimed that he had overcome and removed his doubts, *tiṇṇā m'ettha kaṅkhā, vigatā kathaṃkathā* (DN II 283). The discourse concludes by revealing that Sakka's removal of doubt had been thorough indeed, as he had attained streamentry while listening to the Buddha (DN II 288).

The role of theoretical inquiry and understanding for the removal of doubt is reflected in a discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, which indicates that to overcome doubt, *kaṅkhaṃ vitarati*, is a benefit to be expected when one listens to the *Dhamma* (AN III 248). A specific instance for this potential is the *Sampasādanīya-sutta*, which concludes by noting that its treatment is of particular benefit for overcoming doubt in regard to the Buddha (DN III 116).

Familiarity with the *Dhamma* will even be of benefit in a future life, since one will recognize the teachings if one comes across them again without hesitation, just as someone who hears the sound of a drum or a conch would have no doubt or uncertainty about the nature of the sound just heard (AN II 185).

The need to remove doubt in relation to *Vinaya* matters appears to have been the rationale for the title given to the commentary on the monastic rules, the "Dispeller of Doubt", *Kaṅkhavitaraṇī*. The degree to which matters related to *Vinaya* might lead to the arising of doubts can also be seen from the name of the monk Kaṅkhārevata, "Revata the doubter", who apparently was given this nick-name because he had been greatly worried and concerned about properly maintaining ethical conduct (Ud-a 314). Kaṅkhārevata was successful in settling his doubts for good, as a discourse in the *Udāna* reports him seated in meditation, reviewing his own purification through overcoming doubt, *kaṅkhāvitaraṇavisuddhi* (Ud 60).

As this reference shows, the removal of *kaṅkhā* - a synonym to *vicikicchā* - is not only a matter of relevance in relation to *Vinaya*, but also in a more general sense, reflected in the fact that it constitutes a distinct stage in the series of purifications that lead up to liberation (MN I 147).

With stream-entry doubt is eradicated for good, *kaṅkhā pahīnā* (SN III 203), and the stream-entrant can be qualified as one who has overcome doubt, *tiṇṇavicikicchā* (DN I 110). This removal takes place at the moment of stream-entry itself (AN I 242 and Sn 231), when the deathless element is seen and realized through wisdom (SN V 221). Such direct realization is described in the discourses as the arising of the dustless and stainless eye of the *Dhamma*, due to which the stream-entrant sees, attains, understands and fathoms the *Dhamma*. Having removed doubt and overcome perplexity the stream-entrant has

gained intrepidity and become independent of others in regard to the teacher's dispensation (e.g. MN I 380).

Only once doubt has been overcome in this way, will it be possible to eradicate passion, anger and delusion (AN V 147). Other advantages of overcoming doubt are that one will meet deadly disease with composure (AN II 175), and that one will be able to live in secluded spots in a forest wilderness without fear (MN I 18).

Based on the total removal of doubt through the experience of stream-entry, a noble disciple is endowed with unwavering confidence or faith, *aveccappasāda* (SN V 357). Coming back to a point already made above, faith and confidence, instead of being required to overcome doubt, are rather the result of the successful removal of doubt through investigation.

8. Personality View / *Sakkāyadiṭṭhi*

"Personality view" or else "identity view" translate the term *sakkāyadiṭṭhi*, whose components are *sat* "existing", *kāya*, "body" and *diṭṭhi* "view". *Kāya* in the present context has a sense that goes beyond its usual meaning as the physical body, so that the entire term *sakkāya* stands for "embodiment", "identity" or "personality", hence the rendering "personality view" or alternatively "identity view".

According to the *Sakkāya-sutta* (SN III 159), the five aggregates affected by clinging are what make up one's identity or personality. Such identity or personality arises due to craving and will cease if craving is overcome, wherefore the path leading to the cessation of personality is the noble eightfold path. That is, the way leading to the cessation of personality is the way that leads to the cessation of *dukkha* (SN III 44).

Personality view involves a conversion of the instinctive sense of an 'I' at the core of subjective experience into a substantial and possibly even metaphysical entity, an act of 'identification' or 'personification' that engenders the notion of a self, and from this notion then evolves into a full-fledged view.

In the present chapter, I will first examine the manifestations of personality view (8.1). Then I will turn to the removal of personality view (8.2).

8.1 Manifestations of Personality View

According to the standard definition in the discourses, the genesis of such a full-fledged personality view operates based on one or the other of twenty possible modes (MN I 300).

These twenty modes are arrived at by considering any of the five aggregates in one of the following four manners:

- the aggregate is the self
- the self possesses the aggregate
- the aggregate is part of the self
- the self is within the aggregate

This twenty-fold matrix sets the paradigm for the arising of any manifestation of personality view.

Instances of these twenty modes of identity view make their appearance in several discourses, which thus illustrate the implications of personality view. The *Mahātaṇhāsaṅkhaya-sutta* reports a monk assuming that the selfsame consciousness continues through the round of rebirths, this consciousness being what speaks, feels and experiences karmic retribution (MN I 256). In reply to this thorough misunderstanding, according to the discourse the Buddha highlighted the dependent arising of consciousness, thereby indicating that the monk's mistaken view implies a causally independent self. Such notions of causal independence and mastery are the soil in which personality view grows. Yet, neither body nor feelings, perceptions, volitional formations or consciousness are in the final account amenable to full control (MN I 231 and SN III 66), so that to take any of these as an independent self turns out to be just an illusion.

In the *Mahāpuṇṇama-sutta* another monk wonders who will be affected by karmic retribution, given that all five aggregates are not-self (MN III 19). While the above-mentioned monk had fallen into the error of not taking the dependent arising of consciousness into account, the monk in the present case mistakenly believed the denial of a self to imply a denial of karmic retribution and empirical continuity. Both of these mistaken conceptions are simply offsprings of the same personality view and stem from a failure to fully appreciate the implications of

dependent arising, which stands for continuity without a continuous essence.

Another discourse depicts Māra challenging the nun Vajirā by asking her who has created the 'being' and where the 'being' had come from (SN I 135). Unlike the two monks mentioned above, the nun Vajirā had developed a deeper understanding of the teachings and was thus quick to point out that Māra was under the sway of views, a reference indicating that his notion of a 'being' was an instance of personality view. Just as a chariot is merely a functional assemblage of parts, she explained, so too the expression 'being' refers merely to the functional assemblage of the five aggregates.

Just as the term 'chariot' is simply a convention, similarly the superimposition of the notion of an 'I' on experience is nothing but a convention. Yet, the above example from the *Mahāpuṇṇama-sutta* shows that disclosing the merely conventional nature of 'I' notions can lead to misunderstandings. In terms of the chariot simile: to reject the existence of an independent and substantial chariot does not render it impossible to ride in the functional assemblage of conditioned and impermanent parts to which the concept 'chariot' refers. In a similar way, to deny the existence of a self does not imply a denial of the existence of the conditioned and impermanent interaction of the five aggregates.

The question posed above by Māra recurs as part of a whole set of confused types of thinking under the influence of personality view, described in the *Sabbāsava-sutta* (MN I 8). According to this discourse, a worldling is prone to wonder: 'Did I exist in the past or not, and if I existed, what was I in the past?' 'Will I exist in the future or will I not exist?' 'Am I at present or am I not?' 'Where did this being come from, where will it go to?' Reflecting unwisely in this way, the *Sabbāsava-sutta* explains, causes the arising of various types of views about a self.

Among these views, one finds not only the view proposed by the monk from the *Mahātaṇhāsaṅkhaya-sutta*, presuming that the self speaks, feels and experiences karmic retribution, but also the view 'no self exists for me', corresponding to the type of thinking that occurred in the monk from the *Mahāpuṇṇama-sutta*. Leaving behind such unwise reflections, the *Sabbāsava-sutta* continues to explain, and wisely attending to the four noble truths one will abandon the fetter of personality view through the attainment of stream-entry.

The twenty possible modes of personality view constitute the basic breeding ground for the arising of all kinds of other views. As a discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* explains (SN IV 287), the different views described in the *Brahmajāla-sutta* are but the outcome of personality view (DN I 12). Were it not for personality view, such views would not arise.

The same point recurs in another discourse, which explains why the Buddha did not make a pronouncement concerning a set of current philosophical propositions about the nature of the world (eternal or not, boundless or not), the relationship of the soul to the body (identity or not) and the destiny of a Tathāgata after death (exists, does not exist, both, neither). According to this discourse, such propositions only arise when one takes the aggregates to be a self in any of the abovementioned twenty modes (SN IV 395).

Though personality view as the root of all views is certainly incorrect, it is not necessarily a "wrong view" (*micchādiṭṭhi*) in the technical sense of the latter term. Wrong view definitely leads to an evil rebirth, either in the animal realm or in hell (AN I 60). The same cannot be said of personality view.

One who falls prey to personality view, and thereby to the erroneous presumption of a self, might still perform wholesome deeds and believe in karmic retribution. Though the mistaken belief in a self would prevent awakening, it will not pre-

vent a favourable rebirth. It may well be for this reason that the discourses do not explicitly identify personality view as a wrong view and in one instance even list wrong view side by side with a synonym for personality view (*attānudiṭṭhi*) as different types of views (AN III 447). Thus, personality view is a fetter binding to continuous existence, but not a fetter that inevitably results in future existence in the lower realms.

Personality view as a fetter binding to continuous existence is one of the three fetters that are overcome with stream-entry (AN I 242). Since personality view in its twenty modes boils down to 'I'-dentifying with the five aggregates [affected by] clinging, the cure required to gain freedom from such identification is contemplating these five aggregates as devoid of 'mine', 'I am', and 'my self' (SN III 68). Such contemplation not only covers the last mentioned view 'my self' – personality view proper – but also its foundations: the sense of 'I am' as a manifestation of conceit and the mode of craving underlying the attribution of 'mine' to whatever objects can possibly be appropriated in this way.

Concerning the notion 'mine', the *Mūlapariyāya-sutta* explains that this notion arises out of a basic pattern of conceiving in relation to experienced phenomena (MN I 1). In the case of earth, for example, based on the experience of perceiving earth, the process of conceiving typical for a worldling proceeds like this: the conception 'earth' arises, paving the way to the creation of a subject-object relationship as 'in earth' and 'from earth', which then leads to the notion 'mine' in relation to earth. That is, the sensory input of what is perceived is first accorded real object status and then appropriated. With this act of appropriation, 'self'-ishness comes into being. To appropriate is to control, so that this act of appropriation as 'mine' enhances and confirms the sense of a substantial subject able to exert control.

Due to this inherent notion of a substantial subject able to exert control, the five aggregates [affected by] clinging are experienced as embodiments of the notion 'I am'. From the worldling's point of view, the material body is 'where I am', feelings are 'how I am', perceptions are 'what I am' (perceiving), volitions are 'why I am' (acting), and consciousness is 'whereby I am' (experiencing). In this way, each aggregate offers its own contribution to enacting the reassuring illusion 'I am'. Such 'I am' notions are but erroneous superimpositions on experience, conveying the sense of an autonomous and independent subject that reaches out to acquire or reject discrete substantial objects.

It is this basic fundamental notion of an 'I' which in its rationalised form becomes the full-fledged personality view as 'my self' and therewith forms the basis for all kinds of other views. Already a new born baby has the underlying tendency to personality view, even though while being an infant the child is still without a developed sense of being an individual (MN I 432). This goes to show that the problem posed by personality view is not merely a matter of verbally articulating self notions. In fact, expressions such as 'I' and 'mine' are still used by an arahant, for conventional purposes (SN I 14).

Hence to go beyond personality view is not a matter of rhetoric. Instead, it requires overcoming and eradicating the craving, conceit and view forming process that in the case of the ordinary worldling accompany the use of such expressions as 'I' and 'mine'.

8.2 Removal of Personality View

With the attainment of stream-entry, the fetter of personality view is forever eradicated. The notion 'I am' as an expression of conceit still lingers on and will only be abandoned with full awakening (SN III 130). For this same reason, the *Mūlapari-*

yāya-sutta advises that the disciple in higher training (*sekha*) should avoid taking experienced phenomena as 'mine' (MN I 4). A rationale for this injunction comes to the fore in another discourse, according to which the Buddha – somewhat tongue in cheek – invites his disciples to cling to a self doctrine, if they should be able to find a self doctrine that does not result in the arising of *dukkha* (MN I 137).

The dire consequences of self notions are not easily seen and the many folk delight in identity and thus remain in the bondage of Māra (It 92). Fettered, obsessed and enslaved by personality view, worldlings are unaware of the possibility to escape from it (MN I 433). "See this world with its gods", a verse in the *Sutta-nipāta* proclaims, "conceiving what is not self to be a self" (Sn 756). As this verse indicates, men as well as gods are under the sway of personality view. Among gods endowed with a long life span the mistaken belief in a permanent self can arise easily. On hearing the Buddha proclaim the impermanent nature of identity, these gods are then struck with fear, realizing that they too are caught up in the predicament of personality (AN II 33).

A monastic disciple who does not feel inspired to give up personality is like a man who attempts to swim across the river Ganges, but out of weakness is unable to safely cross over (MN I 435). Lack of inspiration for the relinquishment of identity may sometimes be due to attachment to deeper stages of concentration (AN II 165). More mundane reasons for delighting in personality can be taking pleasure in activity, in chattering, in sleeping, in socializing and in conceptual proliferation (AN III 292).

Once the mind has gained the inspiration to relinquish personality, however, one has gone beyond the underlying tendency to delight in it (AN III 246). In fact, from the viewpoint of noble ones the very giving up of personality is happiness indeed. What the many folk take to be happiness, noble ones

see as misery, but what the many folk call misery, the noble ones know to be happiness (SN IV 127).

Once *Nibbāna* is experienced, the much cherished 'I' is seen for what it is: an act of cheating and deluding oneself (MN I 511). Such cheating and deluding oneself through clinging to identity is like being on the near shore of a water expanse (SN IV 175), a shore beset by danger and fearful, while the other shore, safe and free from danger, is *Nibbāna*, the cessation of identity.

9. Right View / *Sammādiṭṭhi*

Right view is the first factor of the noble eightfold path and a quality of fundamental importance in early Buddhism. Just as the dawn is the forerunner of the sun, similarly right view is the forerunner of all wholesome things (AN V 236).

To understand the range of right view requires some understanding of its direct opposite: wrong view (*micchādiṭṭhi*). The opposition between these two lies in the fact that while right view heads the path leading to deliverance, wrong view heads the path that leads ever deeper into *dukkha*. Hence in what follows, I will first of all examine wrong view (9.1), before turning to various aspects related to right view (9.2-5).

9.1 Wrong View

Wrong view is one of the ten unwholesome courses of action (*akusala kammapatha*), singled out as those actions that have a particular propensity for leading to an evil rebirth. No other thing is as conducive to a lower rebirth as wrong view (AN I 31), with its potential for resulting in being born in the animal realm or in hell (AN I 60). Just as all growth originating from a bitter seed will be of a bitter nature, so whatever deeds, words, thoughts, intentions and aspirations that originate from wrong view will all conduce to ill and suffering (AN I 32).

It almost seems as if wrong view were a necessary requirement for being reborn in hell. In fact, unless beings were blindfolded by a false perspective, by the fond hope that somehow or other they will be able to get away with evil acts or behav-

iour, they would quite probably not undertake the type of evil deeds that will ripen in rebirth in the nether worlds.

The discourses describe various manifestations of wrong view. Some instances of wrong view are related to karmic retribution, when wrong view consists in presuming that by behaving like a dog or a cow (MN I 387), by being an actor and entertaining people (SN IV 307), by performing one's duty in warfare as a mercenary (SN IV 309) or as a cavalry warrior (SN IV 311), one will be reborn in heaven. Such wrong views involve a misconception of karma and its fruit, mistakenly believing that a type of behaviour which has the propensity of leading to a lower rebirth will meet with a heavenly reward.

Other manifestations of wrong view are examined in the *Apaṇṇaka-sutta*, such as: 'there is no other world', 'there is no action' and 'there is no cause' (MN I 402-8). Such wrong views not only misconceive, but even flatly deny the existence of karmic retribution and causality, and consequently also discount the existence of other realms of existence.

The *Sāmaññaphala-sutta* records that several religious teachers living at the time of the Buddha propounded such wrong views. According to its report, one of them held the view that action has no ethical quality, in the sense that there is no real difference between killing and helping others, between destroying and offering gifts (DN I 52). According to the same discourse, other contemporary teachers denied causality or else taught a theory according to which cutting off someone's head should not be considered 'killing', but should be reckoned only as an inserting of a blade in the space between different material principles.

Another teacher described in the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta* proposed that there is no karmic retribution for good and evil deeds, no world beyond, no responsibility towards one's parents, no spontaneously arisen beings and no spiritually realized

practitioners (DN I 55). His philosophical position is shown to be based on a materialistic conception, which attempts to reduce experience to an interaction of the four elements and takes bodily death to be complete annihilation.

This type of view is not altogether uncommon in modern days, yet it seems to constitute wrong view par excellence. This can be deduced from the circumstance that the *Mahācattārīsaka-sutta* not only uses the same formulation for its definition of wrong view, but also defines right view in exactly the opposite terms. Thus right view proposes that there definitely is karmic retribution for good and evil deeds, there is a world beyond, one has responsibility towards one's parents, there are spontaneously arisen beings and there are those who have gained spiritual realization (MN III 72).

9.2 Right View and Investigation

When examining this type of right view, described in the *Mahācattārīsaka-sutta*, it becomes evident that not all propositions made here are empirically verifiable by an average person. Direct knowledge of the existence of spontaneously arisen beings, for example, would require the development of special abilities, which according to early Buddhism can be gained through mastering deeper levels of concentration.

Nevertheless, the main propositions entailed by such right view need not be accepted on mere faith alone. The *Apaṇṇaka-sutta* describes a kind of wager argument in favour of propositions that are beyond one's present powers of verification (MN I 402). Even though one may lack certainty about retribution for one's deeds in a future life, just accepting the possibility of such retribution in principle will lead one to act in wholesome ways. Acting in wholesome ways one will encounter respect, friendship and praise in the present world, positive results that are more immediately verifiable than future heavenly rewards.

The Discourse to the *Kālāma*s makes a somewhat similar point, contending that the beneficial results of implementing the basic premises of wholesome ethical conduct are verifiable within one's personal experience (AN I 189). Hence, these principles can be accepted without needing to rely merely on faith, oral tradition or any other type of external authority.

That right view is not a matter of faith in an external authority alone can also be inferred from the two factors that lead to the arising of right view and wrong view: Right view arises in dependence on the voice of another and wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*), wrong view arises in dependence on the voice of another and unwise attention (AN I 87).

The first factor mentioned in this stipulation gives proper place to the influence exercised by others, a circumstance reflected also in the statement that to establish others in right view is for the welfare and benefit of many, just as to establish others in wrong view is to their detriment and disadvantage (AN I 33). The difference between the arising of right or wrong view, however, is not only a question of the content of what another may communicate. Of crucial importance is the second factor mentioned above, the presence of wise or unwise attention. In fact, this second factor seems to be the more important of the two, since another passage proclaims that no other condition is of such importance for the arising and development of right view as wise attention, just as unwise attention stands out as the decisive factor for the arising and development of wrong view (AN I 31).

Wise attention means to give attention "thoroughly" or "down to its origin" (*yoniso*). That is, right view is a matter of thorough examination. The recommendations given in the *Apaṇṇaka-sutta* and in the Discourse to the *Kālāma*s would be practical implementations of this second quality, that is, the development of wise attention. All this goes to show that the conception of right view in early Buddhism is not a matter of

mere blind acceptance of a set of propositions, but by its very nature requires an intelligent and scrutinizing investigation that is to be undertaken by the person about to take up such view.

Along the same lines, the *Cūḷavedalla-sutta* places right view among the aggregate of wisdom (MN I 301). This is remarkable, since in this way the sequence of the noble eightfold path has wisdom first, followed by morality and concentration. In other contexts, such as descriptions of the gradual path, one regularly finds the sequence morality, concentration, wisdom instead. The noble eightfold path's departure from the more common sequence highlights the function of right view in providing the all important directional input for the practice of the path. Without the guiding principle provided by right view and expressed by right intention, the training in the path will not be able to issue in deliverance.

9.3 Right View as the Forerunner of the Path

A highlight on the fundamental role of right view is provided in the *Mahācattārīsaka-sutta*, which emphatically proclaims that right view is the forerunner of the noble eightfold path (MN III 71). In regard to each factor of the path discussed in this discourse, the task of right view is invariably to distinguish between their right and wrong manifestations.

Such right view as the ability to differentiate between right and wrong manifestations of the path factors needs to be supported by the monitoring function of right mindfulness and by the right effort of overcoming what is wrong and implementing what is right. The cooperation of these three, headed by right view, will put the other path factors into action.

In relation to the first path factor itself, the *Mahācattārīsaka-sutta* comes out with the statement that to understand right view as right view is right view. Though this might at first sound tautological, if the function of right view as the guiding

principle for the entire path is appreciated, the statement made in the *Mahācattārīsaka-sutta* will become intelligible. By providing this guiding principle of clearly distinguishing between what leads ahead on the path and what runs counter to it, right view becomes the forerunner for each of the path factors discussed in the *Mahācattārīsaka-sutta*, including itself. That is, right view is 'right' in as much as it 'rightly' leads onward on the path to liberation. This takes place because the 'view' of right view focuses on progress on the path, it 'views' liberation as the foremost priority for oneself, as well as for others.

The clear orientation that results from such implementation of right view will provide a strong liberating directive to one's whole life. Just as all the water in the ocean has the same taste of salt (AN IV 203, Ud 56, Vin II 239), so right view developed in this manner will pervade all one's deeds, thoughts and experiences with the taste of liberation.

The *Sammādiṭṭhi-sutta*, the "Discourse on Right View", highlights that recognition of what is wholesome and what is unwholesome is a manifestation of right view (MN I 47). In the *Dvedhavitakka-sutta* the same basic distinction takes the form of dividing thoughts into wholesome and unwholesome types (MN I 114). The discourse indicates that this division of thoughts was part of the Buddha's pre-awakening cultivation of the mind and paved the way for his attainment of full liberation. Taken together, these passages illustrate how right view – as the recognition of what is unwholesome and thereby productive of *dukkha*, in contrast to what is wholesome and therefore conducive to freedom from *dukkha* – constitutes indeed the very foundation of the path.

Right view is not only a precondition for being able to embark on the practice of the path. The same path factor remains of continuous relevance throughout. The progressive evolution of right view proceeds via the stage of becoming fully established with stream-entry until the highest consummation of the

path, when it becomes the right view of one beyond training (AN V 222). That is, right view remains the forerunner of the path even in the case of an arahant, and there is no point at which right view is to be left behind. In this way, right view continues to be of relevance throughout, showing how this fundamentally important path factor is dynamic, something that evolves concomitant with the development of the path it heads.

The progress from right view as the initial guiding principle of the path to right view as the insight gained through the development of the path comes to light in the *Mahācattārīsaka-sutta*, which distinguishes right view into two kinds: right view affected by attachment and right view free from it (MN III 72). Right view still affected by attachment refers to the earlier mentioned set of propositions about the nature of reality in terms of its causal functioning and of the existence of certain phenomena in it such as spontaneously arisen beings and spiritually accomplished practitioners. The other type of right view, mentioned in the *Mahācattārīsaka-sutta*, is the presence of wisdom during awakening itself.

9.4 Arrival at Right View

With the first level of awakening attained, the stream-enterer has 'seen' the *Dhamma* (MN I 380) and is henceforth endowed with 'view' (MN III 64), an expression indicating that from now on right view has become firmly established and unshakeable.

The *Sammādiṭṭhi-sutta* (MN I 46) describes various ways of arriving at such right view, most of which are based on insight into one of the links of dependent arising. In regard to each of these links, the requirement for gaining right view is insight into the item in question, into its arising, into its cessation, and into the way leading to its cessation. In this way, the *Sammā-*

diṭṭhi-sutta applies the basic scheme of the four noble truths to each of the links of dependent arising.

The topic of dependent arising comes up again in an explanation of right view in the *Kaccānagotta-sutta* (SN II 17). Here right view is shown to be the middle path of dependent arising, which avoids the extremes 'all is' and 'all is not'.

Other discourses indicate that to see the impermanent nature of the five aggregates (SN III 51), or of the six senses and their objects (SN IV 142) constitutes right view. According to these discourses, by 'rightly viewing' the aggregates or senses as impermanent one becomes disenchanted, desires fade away, and eventually liberation will be gained. A similar perspective on right view can be found in the *Mahāsaḷāyatanika-sutta*, which reckons the abandoning of craving and delight in regard to the six sense-spheres, and in regard to the feelings that arise in dependence on them, as constituting right view (MN III 289).

9.5 Right View and the Four Noble Truths

Whether it is insight into the dependent arising of *dukkha* or into the impermanent and thereby unsatisfactory nature of the five aggregates or the six senses spheres, what right view in these various descriptions amounts to is insight into the four noble truths. Just as the footprints of all animals fit into the footprint of an elephant, similarly the teachings of the Buddha are all contained in the four noble truths (MN I 184). Hence it comes as no surprise when the most frequent formulation of right view found in the discourses speaks simply of insight into the four noble truths: "knowledge of *dukkha*, its arising, its cessation and the path leading to its cessation – this is right view" (e.g. SN V 8).

Right view in terms of the four noble truths parallels a fourfold method of diagnosis and prescription used in ancient Indi-

an medicine, which proceeds from recognition of a disease (*dukkha*) and the virus responsible for it (*taṇhā*) to the possibility of complete health (*Nibbāna*) and the practical cure (*magga*) to be undertaken to that end (T II 105a25 and T II 462c10). This parallelism underlines the pragmatic orientation of right view.

In fact, the four noble truths are not just four propositions to be accepted, but rather constitute a four-facetted approach to the gaining of truth. Each of these four facets requires a particular activity: the first truth needs to be "understood", the second needs to be "abandoned", the third needs to be "realized" and the fourth needs to be "developed" (SN V 436). The range of activities described here corroborates that right view is a matter of practice and realization.

Now what does right view by way of the four noble truths amount to? In practical terms, it amounts to identifying any form of attachment as a cause for the arising of *dukkha*. Now to be able to identify attachment as and when it manifests requires monitoring one's mental condition as continuously as possible. The guiding principle for such monitoring is the simple question: 'does this lead to *dukkha*?', or: 'does this lead to freedom from *dukkha*?' – a query to be posed in relation to oneself as well as to others.

Regular mental repetition or reminding oneself of this simple maxim will slowly build up an inner awareness of its main thrust, a basic 'feel' for its directional input that becomes ingrained and pre-conceptual. Put into practice in this way, the perspective underlying this maxim will eventually resurge during any activity on its own in order to provide the necessary orientation.

Right view in terms of the ability to identify attachment as being responsible for the arising of *dukkha* also underlies the treatment of views found in the *Aṭṭhakavagga* of the *Sutta-*

nipāta, where numerous verses speak in favour of going beyond views. That is, to leave behind all views in the sense of letting go of dogmatic adherence and attachment is none other than the practical implementation of insight into the four noble truths. This, however, does not imply that such insight also needs to be discarded. Far from it, since this same insight as the right view forerunner of the entire path continues up to and beyond the stage of full awakening.

That right view continues even when 'views' are left behind can be inferred from a verse in the same *Sutta-nipāta*, which recommends "not going into views", yet "being endowed with vision" (Sn 152). Similarly, the *Aggivacchagotta-sutta* points out that the Buddha had put away "views" (*diṭṭhi*), having "seen" (*diṭṭhaṃ*) the impermanent nature of the five aggregates (MN I 486). The word play in these passages on various derivatives of the same Pāli term clearly indicates that though views are left behind, vision still continues, corresponding to the faculty of insight represented by right view. In short: right view as the vision gained through deep insight is what 'sees through' any view.

In this way, the scheme of the four noble truths – corresponding to the standard definition of right view – can be applied to views itself: insight into views, their arising, their cessation and the path leading to their cessation. Such insight will lead to freedom from *dukkha* (AN IV 68). This is precisely what makes the four noble truths become right view, namely that they lead to disenchantment, peace, direct knowledge and *Nibbāna* (MN I 431).

For right view to issue in full awakening requires its development in dependence on seclusion, dispassion and cessation, thereby culminating in letting go (SN IV 367). A similar nuance underlies also a stipulation found in the *Kosambiya-sutta*, according to which the development of right view should result in internal tranquillity and stillness (MN I 323). Quite in keep-

ing with these indications on the appropriate affective attitude towards views, the *Madhupiṇḍika-sutta* reports how the Buddha, on being challenged to proclaim his view, calmly answered that his view was such as to lead to the absence of quarrelling with anyone (MN I 108).

These passages show that the early Buddhist conception of right view is not only a question of content but also of attitude. Only right view free from attachment and clinging can unfold its full potential for progress on the path.

Undertaken in this way, right view becomes the escape from all views, and thus is of great fruit, proper, wholesome, blameless, productive of happiness, and the bright way; wherefore it is to be followed, developed, made much of and realized (AN V 238-247). In short: just as the river Ganges inclines towards and leads to the sea, so right view inclines towards and leads to *Nibbāna* (SN IV 180).

10. Volitional Formations / *Saṅkhārā*

The term *saṅkhāra* combines *kāra*, "making", with the prefix *saṃ-*, "together", and thus has the literal sense of "making together ". An example for such making together can be found in an allowance in the *Vinaya* for "making together" (*abhisaṅkharituṃ*) a medicinal ointment, in the sense of preparing it (Vin I 205). Another relevant passage can be found in a verse in the *Sutta-nipāta*, where the etymologically closely related *saṅkhata* qualifies a raft as being well "made together" (Sn 21), conveying the sense that this raft is well constructed.

In the discourses, the term *saṅkhāra* can have an active and a passive sense, representing both that which makes together and that which is made together. The more active nuance of a 'making together' in the sense of the exercise of volition or will-power is more prominent in the term *abhisaṅkhāra*, which could be rendered as "volitional determination", while the passive nuance of something being 'made together' in the sense of being a product of conditions underlies the related term *saṅkhata*, which qualifies something as being "conditioned".

The term *saṅkhāra* itself comprises all these nuances, a fact which makes it impossible to capture the whole range of meaning of this term with a single English expression. Various translations have been proposed, such as "activity", "coefficient", "composition", "compound", "concoction", "concomitant", "confection", "constituent", "construction", "determinant", "disposition", "fabrication", "formation", "force", "preparation", "process", "synergy", and "volition". Each of these captures one or several aspects of the term, yet none is able to fully account for the entire range of meanings underlying the term *saṅkhāra*.

To get a clearer picture of this range of meanings, three main contexts in which the term *saṅkhāra* occurs can be distinguished: (1) as the fourth of the five aggregates; (2) as the second link in the twelve-fold formula of dependent arising, and (3) as anything conditioned, the most general sense of the term, exemplified by its usage in the dictum that all *saṅkhāra*s are impermanent (Dhp 277). In what follows, I examine each of these aspects in turn.

10.1 *Saṅkhāra*s as an Aggregate

The *saṅkhāra*s constitute the fourth of the five aggregates [affected by] clinging and in this context represent the conative aspect of mental experience. The aggregate of *saṅkhāra*s depends on contact, being in this respect similar to the aggregates of feeling and perception (MN III 17). This in itself simple statement of conditionality is quite significant in the case of *saṅkhāra*s, as it highlights their dependent nature. What subjectively may give the impression of being an independent core within experience that has intentions and takes decisions, on closer inspection turns out to be just a process of reactions to the input provided by contact. Developing insight in this way reveals the not-self nature of *saṅkhāra*s.

While the aggregates of feeling and consciousness relate to the sense-doors, the aggregates of perception and *saṅkhāra*s relate to the sense-objects, i.e. to forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches and mental objects (SN III 60). This suggests that whereas feeling and consciousness pertain to some degree more to the receptive side of mental experience, perception and *saṅkhāra*s are more actively involved with the object by recognizing it and reacting to it. The sense of reaction is also reflected in the standard definition in the discourses (e.g. SN III 63), according to which the aggregate of *saṅkhāra*s comprises volitions (*cetanā*) arising in relation to the six types of sense-

objects. In short, as an aggregate the *saṅkhāra*s are what reacts to experience.

An example illustrating the sense of volitional activity of the term *saṅkhāra* occurs in a passage that describes how the lay-follower Soṇa had the volition to go forth (Ud 57: *pabbajābhi-saṅkhāra*). On being told by the monk Mahākaccāna of the difficulties of the monk's life, the force of this *saṅkhāra* diminished and he decided to remain a layman. A similar instance can be found in a description of how the general Sīha had the intention of visiting the Buddha (AN IV 180: *gamiyābhisaṅkhāra*). On being told by others that the Buddha was a teacher of non-action, his volition similarly lost force and he decided not to go. In both these instances, however, on a subsequent occasion the volitional force of their respective *saṅkhāra*s became strong enough to override all obstacles, so that finally Soṇa did go forth and Sīha did go to see the Buddha.

Another example illustrating the volitional force of the term *saṅkhāra* can be found in the context of the four roads to supernormal power (*iddhipāda*), which combine different forms of concentration with volitional striving (*padhānasaṅkhāra*). Such volitional striving refers in this context in particular to overcoming what is unwholesome and to establishing what is wholesome (SN V 268).

Volitional striving (*saṅkhārappadhāna*) recurs again elsewhere as a tool for overcoming *dukkha* (MN II 223). The development of volitional striving by way of the four roads to supernormal power can even yield the ability of performing supernormal feats. Here again the *saṅkhāra*s occur, since it is the *iddhābhisaṅkhāra*, literally the "supernormal determination", that is required for performing a magical feat, such as when Mahāmoggallāna shook a heavenly palace with his toe (MN I 253), or when another monk created rain and fire (SN IV 292).

The *Sampasādanīya-sutta* reports that someone with telepathic powers is able to recognize the operation of the *saṅkhāra*s in another's mind (DN III 104). According to this passage, once the volitional direction of such a *saṅkhāra* has been recognised through telepathic powers, it will be possible to predict the type of thought that is about to arise in the other person's mind. This indicates that the *saṅkhāra*s as volitional formations can represent the beginning stages of mental activity, the first inclination or tendency that precedes the arising of fully formulated thought, whose nature is determined by the directional input provided by the respective *saṅkhāra*s.

Although the ability to recognize the operation of such *saṅkhāra*s in another's mind requires telepathic powers, the same is not required for recognizing their operation in one's own mind. In fact, it is precisely with such recognition within the sphere of one's own mind that an intriguing potential for the development of insight arises. Sustained practice of mindfulness is able to unveil the stage when the first inclination or tendency that precedes actual thought arises in the mind. By becoming conscious of reactions at the time of their initial onset, it becomes possible to nip them in the bud in case such reactions should be of an unwholesome nature.

For the development of this ability, contemplation of feelings can offer a rather substantial contribution, since it is through awareness of the affective tone of experience that the beginning reaction can be discerned before it has become fully formulated in thought. Becoming aware of *saṅkhāra*s from the perspective of contemplation of feelings can offer a crucial temporal advantage in this way, since the onset of reaction is quite literally 'felt' at its very inception. Moreover, awareness of the affective undercurrent of thoughts is less prone to distraction by becoming engaged with their content, wherefore such awareness more easily reveals their true nature.

The aggregate of *saṅkhāra*s interacts with each of the other aggregates and has a conditioning effect upon them (SN III 87). It comprises not only volitional reactions in the present moment, but also past and future volitional formations, internally or externally arisen ones, be they gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near (MN III 17). As an aggregate, the *saṅkhāra*s share with the other aggregates the qualities of all conditioned phenomena. Thus all volitions and intentions, representative of the 'will', are impermanent, unsatisfactory and without a self. Though pleasure and satisfaction can be experienced in relation to the aggregate of *saṅkhāra*s – in particular on those occasions where we seem to be able to freely exercise our will – such pleasure and satisfaction are outweighed by the disadvantage of their impermanent and therefore ultimately unsatisfactory nature (SN III 103).

During later developments of Buddhist philosophy, the meaning of the term *saṅkhāra* expanded until it came to include a wide range of mental factors, becoming an umbrella term for assembling such mental factors as, for example, contact, mental application, the five faculties and powers, factors of the noble eightfold path and the absence of hatred and covetousness (Dhs 17). In this way, the *saṅkhāra*s came to stand for anything mental apart from feeling, perception and consciousness. The circumstance that the *saṅkhāra*s as an aggregate usually occur in the plural form and their inherent sense of referring not only to what 'makes together' but also to what 'is made together' may have influenced the choice of the term *saṅkhāra* as a heading for these mental factors and qualities.

Nevertheless, it needs to be kept in mind that this expansion in meaning goes beyond the implications of the aggregate of *saṅkhāra*s in the early discourses, where it represents mainly the volitional aspect of mental experience. From a practical perspective, it is this nuance of intention and will that is of central importance.

10.2 *Saṅkhāras* as a Link in Dependent Arising

In the context of dependent arising, the *saṅkhāra*s also act as volitional formations, yet their role is different due to the basic difference between the two schemes of the aggregates and of dependent arising. The five aggregates are an analysis of the constituents of empirical existence at a particular moment of time. In dependent arising, however, the emphasis is on the conditioned arising of *dukkha*. The difference between these two schemes is somewhat similar to the difference between taking a horizontal and a vertical cut through a particular object. Both are cuts, yet the respective perspective is different.

To illustrate this difference, the case of an arahant can be taken into consideration. An arahant is still endowed with the aggregate of *saṅkhāra*s. However, none of these *saṅkhāra*s is rooted in ignorance, so that none of these *saṅkhāra*s will take part in the dependent arising of *dukkha*. This goes to show that the compass of the *saṅkhāra*s as an aggregate is broader than that of the *saṅkhāra*s as a link in dependent arising.

As the second of the twelve-link formula of dependent arising (*paṭicca samuppāda*), the *saṅkhāra*s lead from the first link of ignorance to the third link of consciousness. According to the traditional interpretation, in this context *saṅkhāra*s represent the karmically active volitional formations responsible for rebirth and continued existence. That is, in the context of dependent arising the *saṅkhāra*s are the creative principle of various forms of existence. This creative potential of the *saṅkhāra*s is reflected in a passage in the *Saṅgīti-sutta* (DN III 211), according to which all beings exist in dependence on *saṅkhāra*s.

The *Papāta-sutta* takes up the conditional relationship between the first link of ignorance (in terms of not understanding the four noble truths) and *saṅkhāra*s. According to its exposition, those who do not understand the four noble truths will

delight in *saṅkhāra*s leading to birth, old age and death, to sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair (SN V 449). In contrast, one who understands the four noble truths will not delight in *saṅkhāra*s and thus be able to gain freedom from birth, old age and death etc.

A related perspective is provided in the *Dvayatānupassanā-sutta*. The discourse declares that all *dukkha* depends on *saṅkhāra*s, whereas with the cessation of *saṅkhāra*s no more *dukkha* will arise (Sn 731). This highlights the role of *saṅkhāra*s as a decisive link in the dependent arising of birth, old age and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair, mentioned above. Once this role is clearly understood and the calming of all *saṅkhāra*s has been reached, the *Dvayatānupassanā-sutta* continues, one will no longer be subject to future existence (Sn 733).

The *Saṅkhāruppatti-sutta* documents the function of *saṅkhāra*s in relation to rebirth (MN III 99). The discourse describes how someone endowed with confidence, morality, learning, generosity and wisdom may have the aspiration to be reborn in a favourable situation as a human or in a heavenly realm. If this mental aspiration is developed and repeatedly cultivated, the person in question will indeed be reborn in that situation or realm. That is, repeatedly developing this type of *saṅkhāra*s is what leads to the particular type of rebirth. The *Saṅgīti-sutta* indicates that an aspiration for a favourable rebirth can also become effective if it is based on the meritorious deed of giving to recluses and Brahmins (DN III 258).

The importance of one's mental inclinations is again highlighted in the *Kukkuravatika-sutta* (MN I 387), which reports a discussion between the Buddha and ascetics who had undertaken the practice of behaving like a dog or like a cow. The discourse indicates that the mental inclination resulting from such a way of behaviour will just lead to rebirth as a dog or a cow. The principle behind this is that *saṅkhāra*s of a particular

type will lead to a corresponding type of rebirth. Hence, someone whose *saṅkhāra*s are similar to those of an animal will simply be reborn as an animal. In this way, *saṅkhāra*s are indeed the creative principle responsible for various forms of existence.

In more general terms, if *saṅkhāra*s are of a harmful nature, they will in turn lead to a rebirth where harmful types of experiences are predominant. That is, each living being creates and forms its own character and existence, both in past lives and at every moment of present existence, through the medium of *saṅkhāra*s.

The significance of *saṅkhāra*s in the context of dependent arising is, however, not confined to rebirth. From the perspective of the development of insight, the second link of *saṅkhāra*s can be seen to represent the operation of one's mental 'conditioning' in the present, in as much as it is rooted in ignorance.

The discourses analyse such mental conditioning from several related angles. One of these perspectives speaks of "influxes" or "taints", *āsava*s, whose fermenting and festering 'influence' keeps on spoiling the mind by 'tainting' it with ignorance and other defilements. Another perspective on the operational mechanism of one's mental conditioning comes to light with the "underlying tendencies", *anusaya,* which in a barely noticeable way 'tend' towards ignorance and assorted evils in the form of 'proclivities' and 'inclinations' of the mind. Yet another perspective on the predicament that results from the conditionings of one's mind is thrown into relief with the "fetters", *saṃyojana*, which depict the lack of freedom of the mind that results from the 'bondage' of ignorance and other detrimental states.

All of these taken together could be subsumed under the term *saṅkhāra* in the sense of one's mental conditioning as a result

of ignorance. This sense of *saṅkhāra* acquires particular significance in relation to another link, where the chain of the dependent arising of *dukkha* needs to be broken: the arising of craving in dependence on feeling. The habitual reaction to feeling by way of craving is the outcome of one's mental conditioning, which in turn is the final result of past volitional reactions under the influence of ignorance. Hence at the converging point of feeling these conditionings, these *saṅkhāra*s, manifest their influence. Through determined and continuous practice these conditionings can be gradually rendered inoperative and eradicated.

The insight perspective that unfolds in this way is complementary to the above-described contemplation of *saṅkhāra*s as volitional reactions that manifest in the present moment. Both are two facets of the same coin: a gradual de-conditioning of the mind.

As the second link of dependent arising, *saṅkhāra*s fall into three main types: bodily, verbal and mental (SN II 4). Thus based on ignorance, one may generate a bodily, verbal or mental *saṅkhāra* either on one's own initiative or else when prompted by others, either deliberately (*sampajāna*) or else without deliberation (*asampajāna*) (SN II 40). The distinctions introduced in this discourse reveal that the generation of *saṅkhāra*s is not necessarily a matter of one's own free decision. Thus one may be prompted by others to generate certain *saṅkhāra*s, or at times one may even react without any deliberation. This makes continuous presence of mindfulness at the level of generating *saṅkhāra*s all the more a crucial requirement.

The *Parivimaṃsana-sutta* introduces another threefold distinction of *saṅkhāra*s. The discourse explains how due to ignorance a worldling generates *saṅkhāra*s that are meritorious (*puñña*), non-meritorious (*apuñña*) or imperturbable (*āneñja*), which in turn lead to the arising of types of consciousness of

the same nature (SN II 82). Once ignorance has been eradicated, however, these three types of *saṅkhāra*s are also abandoned.

10.3 *Saṅkhāra*s in General

The threefold distinction of *saṅkhāra*s into bodily, verbal and mental occurs not only in the context of dependent arising, but also in relation to the cessation of perception and feeling (*saññāvedayitanirodha*). The sequence in which these three *saṅkhāra*s cease on attaining cessation is explained in detail in the *Cūḷavedalla-sutta* (MN I 301). On entering the attainment of cessation at first the verbal *saṅkhāra*s cease, which in this context stand for initial and sustained mental application. This is followed by the cessation of the bodily *saṅkhāra*s, which here stand for the breath; after which the mental *saṅkhāra*s cease, which in the present context comprise perception and feeling.

The explanation given in this discourse shows that these three types of *saṅkhāra*s are different from the threefold distinction into bodily, verbal and mental *saṅkhāra*s applicable to the context of dependent arising. The difference is that the three types of *saṅkhāra*s as the second link in the scheme of dependent arising depend on ignorance. The same cannot be said in the present context, since breathing, mental application, and perception or feeling will still be present in the case of an arahant, in whom ignorance has been eradicated and who therefore has gone beyond the three types of *saṅkhāra*s that lead to the dependent arising of *dukkha*.

The term *saṅkhāra* occurs also in relation to another type of cessation, namely the "gradual cessation of *saṅkhāra*s" that takes place when attaining the four absorptions, the immaterial attainments and the above mentioned cessation of perception and feeling (SN IV 217). The *saṅkhāra*s whose cessation this

passage describes are speech, initial and sustained mental application, joy, breathing, perception of form, perception of infinite space, perception of infinite consciousness, perception of nothingness and finally all perceptions and feelings. The point of this presentation is to show the determining factors of each of these attainments, presented in terms of what has been left when progressing from one of them to what constitutes the next higher experience. Thus with the attainment of the first absorption speech has ceased, with the fourth absorption breathing has come to an end and with the attainment of cessation any perception or feeling has disappeared.

Another usage of the term *saṅkhāra* represents the life-force or the will to live. An example of this usage can be found in a description of how the Buddha overcame a disease with the help of his will to live, his *jīvitasaṅkhāra* (SN V 152). On a later occasion he gave up that same will to live, referred to alternatively as his *āyusaṅkhāra* or his *bhavasaṅkhāra* (SN V 262).

Regarding such *āyusaṅkhāra*s, their presence apparently continues even during the cessation of perception and feeling (MN I 296). Another discourse points out that the speed with which *āyusaṅkhāra*s come to an end is faster than the motion of the sun and the moon (SN II 266). In this particular passage, the *āyusaṅkhāra*s represent life as such, not only the will to live.

The term *bhavasaṅkhāra* recurs in another instance (AN V 88), which explains that the *bhavasaṅkhāra* leading to renewed existence is one of the factors bound to bodily existence (*sarīraṭṭha*). This instance relates the *bhavasaṅkhāra* to the context of rebirth in particular and therewith to its determining role for the continuity of existence. It is significant that in this passage the *bhavasaṅkhāra* occurs together with other terms that are related to the body, such as heat and cold, hunger and thirst, defecation and urination, and restraint of body, speech and livelihood. This gives the term *bhavasaṅkhāra* a strong

nuance of being somehow rooted in or closely related to the body.

Another context within which the term *saṅkhāra* makes its appearance is in relation to five different types of non-returners (e.g. SN V 201). Two of these non-returners can be distinguished according to whether they attain final *Nibbāna* "with exertion" (*sasaṅkhāra*) or "without exertion". A discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* relates attaining final *Nibbāna* "with exertion" to undertaking contemplation of the unattractive nature of the body or of the repulsive nature of food, etc.; while to do the same "without exertion" takes place with the help of developing the absorptions (AN II 155).

At times, the term *saṅkhāra* can cover all five aggregates. Such a usage occurs in a verse by the monk Adhimutta, in which he tells a gang of criminals intending to murder him that he is free from fear, since he knows that there is no 'I' to be killed – only *saṅkhāra*s will pass away (Th 715). A similar sense recurs in a verse by the nun Vajirā (SN I 135), who in reply to a challenge by Māra points out that his notion of a (substantial) 'being' is utterly mistaken, since in reality there is just a heap of *saṅkhāra*s.

*Saṅkhāra*s can also stand for the whole of perceptual experience. Thus the *Pañcattaya-sutta* (MN II 231) explains that for attaining neither-perception-nor-non-perception the presence of anything seen, heard, sensed or cognised becomes an obstruction. This passage uses the term *saṅkhāra* to represent what is seen, heard, sensed or cognised, followed by explaining that this lofty attainment can only be gained with a mere residue of *saṅkhāra*s.

Another relevant instance occurs in a verse in the *Therīgāthā*, where a girl about to be married to a prince decides rather to go forth (Thī 514). When explaining her decision, she points out that she does not delight in what belongs to *saṅ-*

*khāra*s. In this instance, the term *saṅkhāra* appears to represent all the sensual delight and wealth that awaits her on being married.

In the more general usage of the term *saṅkhāra*, the active as well as the passive sense underlying the term can express itself. An example for the active sense occurs in a passage which explains that evil unwholesome things arise due to a cause (*sasaṅkhārā*), not without a cause (AN I 82). The same general sense of *saṅkhāra* as a "cause" recurs in another passage according to which the faculties of pain or pleasure also arise due to a cause (SN V 213). In such contexts, *saṅkhāra* refers to the presence of a "cause" or a "condition".

The passive mode of the term *saṅkhāra* in its general usage stands for all conditioned phenomena. Examples can be found in two discourses (DN II 198 and SN III 146), which describe the splendour and immense wealth possessed by the Buddha in a former life as a king, all of which has changed and passed away. The word used in this context to refer to the former splendour and wealth is *saṅkhāra*. A similar usage occurs in another discourse, which describes a worldwide drought that leads to the parching up of all water and the destruction of all life as an illustration of the impermanent nature of all *saṅkhāra*s (AN IV 100). In this way, the entire realm of existence can be covered through this usage of the term *saṅkhāra* in the sense of *saṅkhata*, of what is "conditioned".

The same general usage also underlies the famous last instruction given by the Buddha before entering final *Nibbāna*, which highlights the impermanent nature of all conditioned phenomena, all *saṅkhāra*s (DN II 156: *vayadhammā saṅkhārā*). This theme recurs similarly in another well-known statement according to which all *saṅkhāra*s are impermanent and unsatisfactory, while all *dhamma*s are not self (Dhp 277-279). This is the way things are, the pattern inherent in them (AN I 286).

To view all *saṅkhāra*s as impermanent figures among the meditation practices of frequent occurrence in the discourses (e.g. AN III 83), a frequency that throws into relief the practical importance of contemplation of impermanence. A relation to *dukkha* can be seen in the threefold distinction of *dukkha* (SN V 56), which distinguishes between outright pain, displeasure due to change and the unsatisfactoriness of all *saṅkhāra*s. Thus, the key to gaining higher wisdom and insight is to properly contemplate *saṅkhāra*s (AN II 94).

The development of insight in regard to *saṅkhāra*s features prominently in the insight instructions delivered by the former Buddha Vipassī, which contrast the disadvantage, degradation and defilement of *saṅkhāra*s to the profitable nature of *Nibbāna*. These instructions caused his listeners to progress from stream-entry to full awakening (DN II 42).

Of all *saṅkhāra*s (in the sense of conditioned phenomena), the noble eightfold path is the best (AN II 34). Though the path is still conditioned and thus is part of what is covered by the term *saṅkhāra* in its widest usage, the goal itself no longer pertains to *saṅkhāra*s, but is beyond all *saṅkhāra*s (Dhp 154: *visaṅkhāra*). *Nibbāna* is not "formed", "made up" or "conditioned", being instead "unconditioned", *asaṅkhata* (Ud 80). With full awakening this "unconditioned" is reached, when lust, hatred and delusion have been de-conditioned and eradicated (SN IV 362). Thus only *Nibbāna* goes beyond the range of *saṅkhāra*s even in their most general sense, being the "stilling of all *saṅkhāra*s" (e.g. MN I 436). Such stilling of all *saṅkhāra*s, the *Dhammapada* explains, is happiness indeed (Dhp 368 and 381).

11. Thought / *Vitakka*

In its usage in the early discourses, the term *takka* often has a negative sense, representing the kind of theoretical speculation and sophistry that can lead to erroneous conclusions and wrong views, as described for example in the *Brahmajāla-sutta* (DN I 16ff). Hence *takka* is seen as one of several unreliable sources of knowledge (AN I 189).

The term *vitakka*, however, does not necessarily carry a negative sense. In the case of *vitakka* it is rather the context that decides whether a particular instance of "thought" should be seen in a negative or in a positive light.

This to some extent is symptomatic of the early Buddhist attitude towards thought and conceptions, in that clear awareness of their limitations does not lead to a wholesale rejection. In fact, *vitakka* fulfils an important role in the Buddhist path, a path that eventually leads to what is beyond thought, *atakkāvacara* (e.g. MN I 167).

This pragmatic attitude towards thought as an important but limited tool pervades the early Buddhist analysis of its significance and manifestations. Important aspects of this analysis are the early Buddhist ethical perspective on thought, the psychological analysis of its arising, the meditative approach to dealing with thoughts described in the *Vitakkasaṇṭhāna-sutta*, the role of *vitakka* in the context of absorption and various imageries related to the nature of thought. In what follows, I examine each of these aspects in turn.

11.1 The Ethical Perspective on Thought

The early Buddhist ethical perspective on thought is, according to the *Dvedhāvitakka-sutta*, a direct outcome of the Buddha's pre-awakening experiences (MN I 114). The discourse reports that during the time of his quest for liberation the bodhisattva Gotama developed a clear distinction between unwholesome thoughts (related to sensuality, to ill-will or to harming) and wholesome thoughts (related to renunciation, the absence of ill-will and harmlessness). The rationale behind this distinction is that the former – thoughts related to sensuality, ill-will and harming – will lead to affliction for oneself and for others, and to loss of wisdom. That is, such types of thought lead away from *Nibbāna*. Based on this clear distinction, the bodhisattva made a determined effort to overcome unwholesome thoughts in order to progress towards liberation.

It is this same crucial distinction that underlies the injunction to develop intentions of renunciation, non ill-will and harmlessness as the second factor of the noble eightfold path (e.g. MN III 251). This formulation of right intention as one of the eight factors of the path reveals the fundamental role of this ethical perspective on thoughts and intentions as a means for progress on the path. Hence, according to the *Sabbāsava-sutta*, one of the methods to counter the influxes is precisely not permitting that thoughts related to sensuality, ill-will and harming remain in the mind, firmly opposing them and removing them (MN I 11).

The proper attitude towards such thoughts is exemplified by King Mahāsudassana, who before retiring for meditation told himself: "Stay there, thoughts of sensuality, ill-will and harming, thus far only, thoughts of sensuality, ill-will and harming" (DN II 186). Making such a determination at the time of approaching one's habitual place for meditation practice can have a remarkable impact on the way actual practice will unfold.

The early Buddhist analysis of thought does not exhaust itself in treating only unwholesome thoughts. Positive thinking is often encouraged, thus for example a particularly recommendable set of thoughts comprises the eight thoughts of a superior person. According to these eight thoughts, the Buddha's teaching is for one of little desires, who is content and secluded, energetic and mindful, concentrated and wise, and, above all, for one who does not delight in conceptual proliferation (AN IV 229). The last item in the list is significant in so far as, within the context of a set of commendable reflections, a warning is sounded not to allow the thinking tendency of the mind free range to proliferate on its own.

11.2 The Arising of Thought

According to the analysis of thought given in the *Dvedhāvitakka-sutta*, what one frequently thinks about will lead to a corresponding inclination of the mind (MN I 115). As the *Dvedhāvitakka-sutta* explains, to frequently think of sensually alluring matters or else of things that cause ill-will and irritation will strengthen the mental tendency that is responsible for the arising of such thoughts. The way out of this vicious circle – where thought leads to an inclination that then causes further thoughts – lies in awareness of what takes place, followed by a determined effort not to allow unwholesome thoughts to continue.

The development of insight into the nature of thought requires in particular becoming aware of thoughts as they arise, are present for a short while, and then pass away (AN II 45). Practising in this way engenders mindfulness and clear comprehension, and constitutes one of the requirements for developing the four types of analytical knowledge, *paṭisambhidā* (AN IV 33).

In regard to the arising of unwholesome thoughts, an important contributing factor is perception, *saññā*. According to the analysis given in the *Samaṇamaṇḍikā-sutta*, the arising of unwholesome thoughts and intentions is due to a corresponding type of perception (MN II 27). That is, the root of unwholesome thought processes lies in the way perception evaluates experience.

Arisen based on a particular type of perception, thought has the propensity of leading on to "conceptual proliferation", *papañca* (MN I 112), which in turn manifests in ever more thoughts of the same type (DN II 277). As the *Madhupiṇḍika-sutta* clarifies, delight in conceptual proliferations and related perceptions are responsible for quarrels and litigations, for malicious words, false speech and other evils (MN I 109). Thus when monks quarrel amongst each other, the conclusion can be drawn that they may not have sufficiently developed the three wholesome types of thoughts, and instead have probably been dwelling frequently in thoughts related to sensuality, ill-will and harming (AN I 275).

Whether unwholesome thoughts occur when one is walking, standing, seated or lying down, they should definitely not be allowed to continue (It 115). Attempts to act on this injunction will soon enough show that to keep unwholesome thoughts out of the mind requires a determined attitude. This is due to the dynamics responsible for the arising of thought, which only too often takes place without conscious deliberation. On closer inspection 'our' thoughts and ideas turn out to be often quite independent of our control.

This state of affairs is familiar terrain for anyone who has practised meditation, where one soon discovers how difficult it is to avoid getting lost in all kinds of thoughts and reflections, daydreams and memories. All this takes place in spite of one's earlier determination to focus on a particular meditation object. To remedy this situation, the arising of thought needs to be

brought into the light of awareness through a gradual taming of the mind in meditation.

Notably, the discourses reckon it as a manifestation of remarkable meditative expertise when a monk can claim that he has such control over his mind that he will only think the thoughts he really wants to think (MN I 122). Successfully teaching others how to properly direct the thinking activity of the mind therefore deserves to be reckoned a miracle in matters of instruction (DN I 214).

In other words, the ability to be free from distracting thoughts is the product of considerable meditative expertise and certainly not the norm for average practitioners, even though only few may be willing to admit to experiencing recurrent distraction in their own practice.

A gradual perspective on how to deal with thought is provided in a discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*. This discourse compares dealing with thought to the gradual refining of gold, where at first gross impurities are removed, followed by removing finer impurities (AN I 253). In a similar way, when attempting to purify the mind at first the gross types of thought, related to overt unwholesome conduct, have to be overcome. Once these are removed, any type of thought related even distantly to sensuality, ill-will and harming needs to be abandoned. With these gone, there still remains the task to leave behind thoughts related to this and that, such as thoughts about one's relatives, home country and reputation, etc. Once these are also left behind, there still remain reflections about the *Dhamma*. Further development of the mind then leads to deepening concentration.

This gradual build-up provides a helpful perspective for actual practice, in that it indicates what needs to be given priority. Instead of sitting down to meditate with the unrealistic expectation of experiencing a completely thought-free mind, the

task is to recognize the condition of one's mind as it truly is at present and then focus on the grossest type of thought that has manifested, according to the above delineated scheme, which proceeds through the following levels:

– thoughts related to overt unwholesome conduct
– thoughts tinged by some degree of sensuality or anger
– distracted thoughts not indicative of sensuality or anger
– wholesome thoughts related to the *Dhamma*

Proceeding through these levels from gross to subtle offers a reasonable and gradual approach to thoughts. Such a reasonable approach is bound to yield results that are realistically within reach, as all that is required is to overcome the grossest level of thoughts manifest at present. Setting one's target at that level helps avoiding the frustration and feelings of helplessness that may arise from expecting levels of mental quietude that are simply beyond the reach of one's present condition.

Giving oneself the reasonable goal of taking just one step at a time in this gradual progression will go a long way in preparing the ground for eventually experiencing a degree of stillness of the mind that earlier seemed beyond reach. Helpful methods relevant to this gradual approach towards thoughts, in particular in relation to the task of removing unwholesome thoughts, are described in the *Vitakkasaṇṭhāna-sutta.*

11.3 The *Vitakkasaṇṭhāna-sutta*

The "Discourse on Stilling thoughts" offers five methods for dealing with unwholesome thoughts (MN I 119). The first of these recommends that, when unwholesome thoughts arise, one should give attention to something wholesome instead in order to be able to develop unification of the mind. To illustrate this approach, the *Vitakkasaṇṭhāna-sutta* describes how a carpenter removes a coarse peg with a finer peg. This simile

conveys the sense of a gradual procedure. Just as the carpenter is not able to simply pull out the coarse peg, so the arising of unwholesome thoughts at times cannot simply be stopped. By way of a gradual approach, instead of attempting to stop thought one tries to change the object of thought, directing the flow of thoughts present in the mind from what is unwholesome to what is wholesome.

The ingenuity of this approach lies in not trying to just force thought to stop on the spot. Instead, the existing thought flow is simply diverted into another direction, somewhat like channelling a running course of water to one's purposes, or avoiding a particular topic during a conversation by broaching another one. If done skilfully, this method requires little effort and may swiftly dispense with unwholesome thoughts.

Eventually this will lead to a stage where it is possible to leave behind wholesome thoughts as well in order to develop concentration, comparable to the carpenter taking out the fine peg, after it has performed its function of removing the coarse peg. But, needless to say, arriving at the removal of the fine peg requires properly removing the coarse peg first.

If this first method does not work, the *Vitakkasaṇṭhāna-sutta* recommends reflecting on the danger inherent in allowing unwholesome thoughts to continue. The discourse illustrates this approach with the example of a beautiful young man or woman, fond of ornaments, who finds that the corpse of a snake or a dog, or even the corpse of a human being, has been hung around his or her neck. This vivid image conveys a sense of urgency and also of shame and disgust that is appropriate in regard to the unbefitting nature of what is going on in a mind overwhelmed by unwholesome thoughts.

In practical terms this means that once the gentle approach of redirecting the course of thought has not been successful, a more direct confrontation by clearly recognizing the objection-

able nature of the unwholesome thoughts is required. This would not imply an involvement with the actual content of the particular thought, but much rather a general recognition of the thoughts as expressive of a particular defilement, coupled with awareness of the harmful nature of this defilement. The resulting sense of urgency and shame will give additional strength to one's attempt to redirect the flow of thoughts into calm waters. In actual practice, this may take the form of a flash-like recognition of the degrading nature of what is taking place in the mind, followed by a firm but gentle nudging of the mind towards wholesomeness in accordance with the first method.

The third method, in case the earlier two have not been successful, is to just forget about these thoughts. This involves a conscious effort to set aside the issue that is agitating the mind, comparable to someone who does not want to see something and therefore just closes the eyes or simply turns away.

The point behind this recommendation appears to be that, given that unwholesome thoughts still continue, it is fairly probable that some concrete issue or event lies underneath their persistent recurrence. In such a case, the issue or event needs to be consciously set aside until a later time, when it will be possible and appropriate to deal with it.

If this also did not work, the fourth method is to give attention to stilling the thought formations, *vitakkasaṅkhārasaṇṭhāna*. The implications of this expression require some interpretation, based on the simile given to illustrate this particular method. This simile describes someone who is walking fast. On reflecting, this person might wonder why he or she is walking so fast and decide to rather walk in a slow manner. Further reflection might lead to the decision to stand still, or even sit down, or eventually to fully relax by lying down. The point of the simile appears to be that through becoming aware of what is taking place, this person is able to let go of the strain

of unnecessary activity and abandon an uncomfortable posture for a more comfortable posture.

Applied to the case of the recurrent arising of unwholesome thoughts, this would then imply giving attention to how these thoughts agitate the mind. Clear awareness of this leads on to inquiring why these thoughts are being entertained, comparable to wondering why one is walking so fast. That is, the volitional driving force behind those thoughts is brought into the light of attention and is put into question. Clear awareness of the thought process, *vitakka*, and the volitional driving force behind it, *saṅkhāra*, enables to calm both and brings about their stilling, *saṇṭhāna*.

In this way, the occurrence of unwholesome thoughts becomes the meditation object itself. Mindful investigation turns to the manifestation and underlying driving force of the unwholesome thoughts, a mode of observation that at the same time engenders a gradual calming of the mental agitation that has been reigning in the mind.

Should all these methods prove to be unsuccessful, as a last resort the *Vitakkasaṇṭhāna-sutta* recommends the use of force of the mind to expel unwholesome thoughts, comparable to a strong man who takes hold of a weak man and overpowers him.

Notably, the same method is elsewhere included among a set of practices that the Buddha tried out before his awakening, but which did not lead him to liberation (MN I 242). This makes it clear why the *Vitakkasaṇṭhāna-sutta* presents this forceful approach only as a last resort, when all the other methods have failed to overcome the recurrent arising of unwholesome thoughts. Even though forceful restraint of the mind on its own will not lead to awakening, it has its place at the present junction since the unwholesome thoughts are evidently so strong that the mind is completely overwhelmed.

Stopping them through the use of force will at least ensure that these unwholesome thoughts will not spill over into some unwholesome activity. To use a modern example, the forceful method is somewhat like an emergency brake. Though an emergency brake will certainly not lead to progress in one's journey, it has its place in order to avoid an accident.

Once by skilful use of one or more of these five methods in accordance with the demands of the present situation it has become possible to replace unwholesome thoughts with their wholesome counterpart, the mind is free to go deeper.

11.4 *Vitakka* in Meditation

As the *Dvedhāvitakka-sutta* indicates, even though thoughts related to renunciation, non ill-will and harmlessness are entirely wholesome, yet, excessive thinking will tire the mind and not lead to concentration. Hence at some point, after sustained progress through the above depicted gradual procedure has been made, even wholesome thoughts need to be left behind in order to steady the mind and lead it to deeper concentration (MN I 116).

Though deeper stages of concentration go beyond thought, this does not mean that *vitakka* has no place at all in the context of early Buddhist meditation practice. In fact, several reflective types of meditation are described in the discourses, involving various recollections, *anussati*. These can take the Buddha, his teachings or the community as their object, or else one's own virtue or generosity, or qualities one has in common with those reborn as heavenly beings (AN III 312).

In the realm of mindfulness meditation proper, thought also has its place. This can be seen from the instructions given in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*, which frequently express what is to be contemplated in direct speech, marked by the particle *iti*. Thus in the case of contemplating feelings, for example, the instruc-

tion is that when experiencing a pleasant or a painful feeling, one should clearly know "I experience a pleasant feeling" or "I experience a painful feeling" (MN I 59). The subtle level of mental verbalization introduced in this way helps to strengthen clarity of recognition. With more advanced levels of practice, such mental verbalization can then be dispensed with.

In the context of the development of absorption (*jhāna*), *vitakka* also has an important function that will be left behind only with deeper levels of concentration reached subsequent to the attainment of the first absorption. To understand the absorption factor *vitakka* as referring to conceptual thought in this context would conflict with descriptions of the first absorption given elsewhere in the discourses. These indicate that the first absorption is a far deeper experience than the type of mental condition in which conceptual thought and reflection take place.

An important clue occurs in the *Mahācattārīsaka-sutta*, which in a list of near synonyms for right intention includes "application of the mind", *cetaso abhiniropanā*, alongside *vitakka* (MN III 73). This suggests that the range of meaning of *vitakka* goes beyond conceptual thought as such, covering also the sense of an inclination of the mind. Both nuances of *vitakka* are in fact closely related to each other, since to reflect or think on something requires an inclination of the mind towards the topic or issue at hand.

The interrelation between these two nuances of *vitakka* can also be seen in the realm of speech. Here *vitakka* is, together with *vicāra*, a formation responsible for speaking, *vacīsaṅkhāra* (MN I 301). Now when one is speaking, at times one may verbally express something that has already been fully formulated in the mind, fully "thought" out. Yet, at other times there may just be a general sense of direction about what one is going to say and one may still have to search the right words while speaking. This general sense of direction also falls with-

in the range of meaning of *vitakka*, not only the fully formulated thoughts at those times when we have already planned our speech. This sense of a general direction, in the sense of an application or inclination of the mind, requires the support of *vicāra* in order to be maintained consistently.

Just as in relation to formulating speech, *vitakka* and *vicāra* express a sense of mental direction and its sustaining, so too in regard to deepening concentration these two fulfil the same role. In the case of deepening concentration, *vitakka* stands for "initial application of the mind" that is supported by *vicāra*, "sustained application of the mind". Such inclining of the mind has to leave behind conceptual thinking in order to lead the mind into the attainment of the first absorption. With the second absorption, then, even this last vestige of mental activity through inclining the mind is left behind, hence the mind reaches true inner silence (SN II 273; cf. also Th 650 and Th 999). Such silence is not only free from conceptual thought, but also free from the 'noise' of deliberate mental application.

11.5 Thought Imagery

The nature of thought is illustrated in the early discourses with the help of several similes. One of these compares the arising of thought to a crow that has been bound to a string and then is tossed up into the air by children (SN I 207 and Sn 271). This imagery brings out how the movement of thought can easily give an illusion of personal freedom. But on closer inspection this personal freedom turns out to be a condition of bondage, comparable to the crow that flies up into the air, only to fall back on the ground due to the string to which it has been bound.

This condition of bondage is particularly evident with thoughts of an unwholesome type, and it is such types of thought with which most similes are concerned. Unwholesome

thoughts are comparable to corruptions of gold that need to be removed in order for the gold to become bright and workable, fit for being fashioned into an ornament by a goldsmith (AN I 253). Unwholesome thoughts are also like a cloud of dust that should be settled, just as a shower of rain will settle any dust (It 83). The images of dust and impurities bring out the obstructive nature of unwholesome thoughts and the need to remove them in order to access the true potential of the mind.

According to the above-mentioned *Vitakkasaṇṭhāna-sutta*, unwholesome thoughts are like the carcass of a dead snake or dog, or even the corpse of a human being that is put around the neck of a young man or woman who is fond of ornaments (MN I 119). This imagery brings out in particular the objectionable nature of unwholesome thoughts. The same is also inherent in another simile that compares unwholesome thoughts to flies that are attracted by rotting meat (AN I 280). The rotting meat in this simile stands for greed and ill-will. These similes emphasize the degrading and even disgusting nature of such thoughts, and the degree to which they can defile the mind.

Successful removal of unwholesome thoughts then is comparable to the ability of a king's elephant to successfully overcome an enemy in battle (AN II 117). The need to restrain unwholesome thoughts is similar to a cowherd who has to beat his cows in order to prevent them from straying into the ripe crops (MN I 115). These images draw out the importance of confronting unwholesome thought. This importance is not only related to mental culture as such, but also to the conditioned impact of thought on subsequent action. This relationship is brought out in yet another simile, according to which thought is like smoke at night, in the sense of representing the planning activity of the mind, whereas the implementation of these plans compares to fire during the day (MN I 144).

The importance of overcoming unwholesome thoughts is also reflected in a twin verse in the *Dhammapada*, which con-

trasts those who are in bondage, due to being unable to control thought, to those who master thought and thereby go beyond bondage.

> "For a person overwhelmed by thought
> Who, strongly impassioned, looks [at things] as beautiful,
> Craving grows ever more.
> He, indeed, makes strong [his own state of] bondage.
>
> Who delights in calming thought,
> Ever mindful develops [perception] of the absence of beauty,
> He will remove [craving].
> He will cut Māra's bondage" (Dhp 349-350).

12. Feeling / *Vedanā*

"Feeling" or "sensation", *vedanā*, is the second of the five aggregates of clinging and the seventh link in the standard depiction of dependent arising, *paṭicca samuppāda* (the link that leads to the arising of craving). The role of feelings in these two contexts reflects the importance of *vedanā* in the early Buddhist analysis of reality. In fact, according to a dictum found in several discourses, all phenomena converge on feeling, *vedanāsamosaraṇā sabbe dhammā* (AN IV 339; AN V 107). Hence an appraisal of feeling and its implications is of considerable importance for an understanding of early Buddhism in general and of the path to liberation in particular.

In the present chapter, I will first of all examine the nature of feelings in general (12.1). Next I will turn in some detail to the distinction between bodily and mental types of feelings (12.2), followed by exploring the relation of feelings to karmic retribution (12.3) and to the formation of views (12.4).

12.1 The Nature of Feelings

The term *vedanā* is derived from the root √*vid*, whose range of meaning covers both "to feel" and "to know". *Vedanā* can thus be understood to represent the affective aspect of the process of knowing, the 'how' of experiencing, so to say. While *vedanā* has a strong conditioning impact on emotions, *vedanā* does not include emotion in its range of meanings. In the thought world of the early discourses, the concept of 'emotion' would perhaps find its closest Pāli counterpart in *citta.* In contrast, *vedanā* simply refers to feelings as one of the building blocks of such complex phenomena as emotions.

As such, *vedanā* stands in an intimate relationship with the cognitive input provided through "perception", *saññā*, since what one feels, one perceives, *yaṃ vedeti taṃ sañjānāti* (MN I 293). According to the standard definition given in the discourses, feeling 'feels', in the sense that it feels such affective tones as pleasure, displeasure and hedonic neutrality, *sukha, dukkha, adukkhamasukha* (SN III 86).

The basic distinction between pleasant, unpleasant and neutral feelings can be expanded further by combining this triad with each of the six senses, by distinguishing between feelings that are related to the household life and those that are related to renunciation, and by taking into account if feelings manifest in the past, present or future. In this way, we arrive at a total count of one-hundred-and-eight types of feelings (SN IV 232). Such different modes of analysis are, however, merely complementary perspectives on the phenomenon feeling, and none of them should be grasped dogmatically as the only right way of considering feelings (MN I 398).

In addition to analysing feelings into different types, the discourses illustrate the nature of feeling with a range of similes. One of these similes indicates that the different types of feelings are like winds in the sky, which come from different directions and can at times be dusty, hot or cold, mild or strong (SN IV 218). This imagery illustrates the somewhat accidental character of feelings, whose nature is to manifest in ways that are often out of one's control. The simile of the winds in the sky thus highlights that just as it is meaningless to contend with the vicissitudes of the weather, similarly, the arising of unwanted feelings is best borne with patience.

Another simile compares feelings to various types of visitors that come to a guesthouse from any of the four directions (SN IV 219). Feelings are similar to such visitors, they come and go, hence no need to become agitated and obsessed with the

particular feeling that might have manifested at present, as soon enough this internal 'visitor' will go as well.

The ephemeral nature of feelings, already alluded to in the image of visitors that come and go, becomes more prominent in another simile that compares feelings to bubbles on the surface of water during rain (SN III 141). On investigating this matter, an onlooker would soon come to the conclusion that these bubbles are insubstantial and without any essence. Feelings, in whatever way they appear, are similarly insubstantial and without any essence. Just like a bubble, they will manifest only to disappear right away, thereby revealing their utterly ephemeral and insubstantial nature.

The insubstantial nature of feelings comes up again in another simile, which compares grasping feeling as a self or as belonging to a self to a man who is carried along by a mountain river and tries to grasp the grass that grows on the river bank. The grass will tear off and break due to his grasping, and the man will be unable to extricate himself from the current of the river in this way (SN III 137).

Insubstantial and void as they are, feelings are simply the product of conditions (SN II 38). Several similes highlight how feeling depends on contact. The affective tone of feeling is the product of the type of contact on which it is based, comparable to heat that is produced when two fire-sticks are rubbed against each other (SN IV 215). Once the two fire-sticks are separated the heat ceases, just as when contact ceases, the respective feeling will also cease.

Again, the radiance of a lamp is the product of oil, wick and flame. Due to the impermanent nature of these three, the radiance has to be impermanent as well. In the same way, feelings are the product of contact through any of the six sense-doors, therefore they must be as impermanent as the sense-doors themselves (MN III 273). Or else, the shadow of a tree is the

product of the root, the trunk, the branches and the foliage of the tree. Given that these are impermanent, the shadow necessarily must be impermanent. The same applies to feelings, which are the product of contacting the objects of the senses and thus share their impermanent nature (MN III 274).

Painful feelings in particular are comparable to a bottomless abyss, an abyss deeper than the unfathomable depth of the ocean. The reason for this is that worldlings react to painful feelings with sorrow and lamentation, thereby perpetuating their experience of suffering (SN IV 206).

The *Salla-sutta* explains that by reacting with aversion to painful feelings, a worldling is as if shot by two arrows: in addition to the bodily experience of pain, the arising of aversion causes the affliction of mental agony and distress (SN IV 208). Being thus immersed in bodily and mental pain, the worldling knows no other way out but to search for some form of sensual pleasure as an escape from the painful experience.

The experience of pain leads to ever greater bondage if one gives fuel to the underlying tendency to aversion when reacting to pain, to the underlying tendency to passion through yearning for sensual pleasure, and to the underlying tendency to ignorance due to not attending to the true nature of feelings.

In contrast to this predicament, the noble disciple does not react to pain but simply bears it with composure. For this reason, only a single arrow afflicts him or her, and aversion to the pain will not arise, nor yearning for sensual pleasures as a way to escape from pain. In this way, the experience of painful feelings leads to insight and the bondage to feelings diminishes.

12.2 Bodily and Mental Feelings

In addition to providing this instructive imagery on how to handle pain, the *Salla-sutta*'s distinction between being afflicted merely by the single arrow of bodily feelings and being

the victim of the additional arrow of mental feelings is of relevance to an understanding of the distinction between bodily and mental feelings in general.

The notion of 'bodily feelings' may at first seem puzzling, since feelings are by definition mental and related to the mind, *cetasikā dhammā, cittapaṭibaddhā* (MN I 301). For this reason, feelings are part of "name", *nāma*, in the context of an exposition of name-and-form, *nāma-rūpa* (MN I 53).

Therefore, to speak of a 'bodily feeling' must refer to the source from which such feeling has arisen, namely the body, not to the nature of the feeling itself, which by definition has to be a mental phenomenon. This much would follow from the exposition in the *Salla-sutta*, whose purpose is to clarify that, in addition to the painful feelings that may arise due to bodily affliction, the second dart of affliction manifests due to feelings that originate because of the mental reaction to bodily pain.

The distinction between bodily and mental feelings is thus a mode of analysis that aims at the sense-door based on which feeling arises. The same mode of analysis may alternatively take into account all sense-doors and distinguish feelings into six types, covering those that arise based on contact by way of the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body and the mind (SN III 60).

Yet, does this mean that the experience of feelings is entirely mental and bears no relation to the body? This does not seem to be the case. In fact, common experience indicates that the actual experience of pleasant or painful feeling involves the body as well as the mind. Joy may manifest as raising of the hair and goose pimples, just as displeasure may show its effects through bodily tension and facial expression. Again, obtaining or losing desirable objects can affect the heart beat and

blood circulation, or else intense feelings can cause faster breathing, etc.

In the listing of the five aggregates, feelings are placed right after the body and before the other mental aggregates. This positioning may well reflect the intermediate role that feelings have within the context of subjective experience. Due to whatever sense-door a pleasant or painful feeling may have arisen, its actual experience will affect the body as well as the mind.

Several discourses in fact reveal aspects of the bodily repercussions of feelings. Thus the *Kāyagatāsati-sutta* depicts how the pleasant feelings of deeper concentration experience suffuse the whole "body", *kāya* (MN III 92), a description that conveys the sense of one's entire being, body and mind, being immersed in pleasure and bliss.

The effect of painful feeling on the body is reflected in passages that describe the Buddha rebuking a monk. As a result of such a rebuke, the monk sits in dismay with shoulders drooping and his head hanging down (e.g. MN I 132). Clearly here the mental evaluation of the words just heard has caused the arising of feelings that, in addition to being experienced in the mind as dismay and perhaps shame, manifest bodily to such an extent that the whole posture is affected.

Feelings can thus be seen as an intermediary between body and mind, having a conditioning effect in both directions. One aspect of this intermediary role is that whatever happens in the body is mentally felt through the medium of feelings, while the other aspect is that the affective tone of mental processes influences the body through the medium of feelings. The actual experience of feeling thus usually involves body and mind. An exception is the attainment of the immaterial spheres, where the bodily component of feeling disappears. With such types of experience the affective variety of feeling similarly disappears, as during these attainments - or else when reborn in the corre-

sponding realms - only neutral feelings are experienced. In the normal living situation of the average human being, however, the experience of feeling involves the body as well as the mind.

In the language of the early discourses, the bodily and mental aspect of feelings are often considered together, such as when *sukha* or *dukkha vedanā* are defined as comprising bodily as well as mentally felt experience, *yaṃ kāyikaṃ vā cetasikaṃ vā ... vedayitaṃ* (MN I 302). In the context of an exposition of experience from the perspective of the five affective faculties, *indriya*, the terms *sukha* and *dukkha* are, however, only used for feelings arisen from the body, *kāyasamphassaja*. Feelings that originate from the mind, *manosampassaja*, are treated under the headings *somanassa* and *domanassa* (SN V 209). This mode of presentation dominates the analysis of feelings in the *Abhidhamma* and the commentaries.

According to an examination of feelings undertaken in the *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, *sukha* and *dukkha* are only experienced in relation to the body sense-door, whereas the other sense-doors of eyes, ears, nose and tongue are invariably associated with neutral feelings, while the mind is associated with *somanassa* and *domanassa* type of feelings (Abhidh-s 2). Occurrences of *sukha* and *dukkha* in the early discourses, however, often function as umbrella terms for any feeling of the corresponding affective tone and need not stand for feelings arisen from the bodily sense-door alone.

In addition to analysing feelings into bodily and mental types, the discourses also distinguish between worldly and unworldly feelings, *sāmisa* and *nirāmisa* (MN I 59). The rationale behind this distinction is to draw attention to the relation of feelings to underlying tendencies, *anusaya*. Worldly types of feelings tend to activate the underlying tendencies to passion, aversion and ignorance. Unworldly types of feelings, such as the joy or the equanimity of deep concentration, or the sadness

of not yet having reached liberation, do not activate these underlying tendencies (MN I 303). A similar perspective underlies the distinction into feelings related to the household life and those that are related to renunciation, *gehasita* and *nekkhammasita* (MN III 217).

Another two-fold analysis of feelings distinguishes between feelings with and without affliction, *savyābajjha* and *avyābajjha* (MN I 389). This perspective is in particular related to the issue of karma and rebirth, since due to the afflictive nature of one's volitions and deeds, one eventually has to face afflictive feelings as retribution. While rebirth in hell is felt as an entirely painful and unpleasant experience, rebirth in heaven will be felt as entirely pleasant and agreeable (MN I 74). Rebirth as an animal involves mainly painful experiences, whereas with rebirth as a human being pleasantly felt experiences prevail.

12.3 Feelings and Karmic Retribution

In regard to the relationship between karma and feelings (see also de Silva 1988), a discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* clarifies that it would not be correct to assume that the retribution of a deed will be felt in a way that exactly corresponds to the nature of the deed (AN I 249). Such an assumption would result in determinism and undermine the possibility of successful spiritual practice. Rather, the retribution to be felt depends on a range of circumstances.

According to a simile given to clarify this point, the same amount of salt will have quite a different effect when being thrown into a small cup of water or into a large river. While in the first case the water will become undrinkable, in the second case the salt will not affect the drinkability of the water. Similarly, the experiences that are to be felt in retribution for a particular deed may vary considerably, depending on the overall nature and the degree of mental development and purity of the person who earlier committed the deed.

An example for this principle is the case of the brigand Aṅgulimāla, who by going forth and becoming an *arahant* was able to avert the prospect of prolonged suffering in hell in retribution for his former evil deeds (MN II 104). Yet, in spite of his remarkable progress and personality change, he could not entirely avoid retribution, which affected him in the form of being physically attacked and beaten when going for alms.

That is, though the intensity of retribution to be felt varies according to a set of conditions, retribution as such cannot be avoided (Dhp 127). A deed whose retribution is to be felt cannot be changed into one whose retribution will not be felt at all (MN II 221), only the intensity of the retribution can be influenced. Hence the painful results of former deeds will touch even an *arahant*, as in the case of Aṅgulimāla.

A similar case is found in the *Udāna*, which describes a monk seated in meditation and experiencing painful feelings as a result of former deeds, *purāṇakammavipākajaṃ dukkhaṃ* (Ud 21). The commentary explains that this monk was also an *arahant* (Ud-a 165). Judging from the commentarial explanation, this monk, too, would have been experiencing a remnant of retribution for former deeds. Being an *arahant*, he bore the pain without generating the second arrow of mental affliction.

Though the experience of feelings may often be related to former deeds, karma is not the only cause for the arising of feelings. As the discourses clarify, feelings could also manifest due to bodily disorders and imbalances, due to a change of climate, due to careless behaviour, or due to being attacked by another (SN IV 230). Therefore, it is not possible to categorically proclaim that the experience of happiness or pain is due to oneself, or else that it is due to another. The correct position is rather that the experience of feeling is the dependently arisen product of contact (SN II 38). Hence it is meaningless to inquire due to whom feelings arise, or else to query who is the one that feels, *ko vediyati* (SN II 13).

12.4 Feelings and Views

The notion of the one who feels and experiences the results of former deeds can in fact easily lead to mistaken notions of a self (MN I 8; see also MN I 258). The *Mahānidāna-sutta* traces three main modes in which notions of a self can arise in relation to feelings (DN II 66; see also Bodhi 1984). The three are: to identify feelings as the self, to consider the self to be without feelings, or to assume that it is the self that feels, in the sense of being subject to feelings.

In the first instance, the impermanent and conditioned nature of feelings would imply that the self is similarly impermanent and conditioned, an untenable notion. In the case of the second and third proposal, the problem arises that in the absence of any feeling, the notion "I am", *asmi*, or the notion "I am this", *ayam aham asmi*, will not arise at all. The argument in the latter two cases shows how closely the experience of feeling is bound up with a sense of identity. If feeling were to be removed, the very point of reference required for self-notions would disappear as well.

Feelings are not only the breeding ground for self-notions, but are also intrinsically related to the genesis of views in general. The *Brahmajāla-sutta* relates the Buddha's transcendence of the obsession with views, prevalent among some of his contemporaries, to his penetrative insight into the true nature of feelings (DN I 17). From his perspective, these various views were merely the result of being under the influence of feelings and of lacking vision and knowledge, thereby succumbing to the grip of craving and becoming subject to worry and agitation (DN I 40).

The point behind this perspective on the process of view-formation is that often enough logic and thought serve merely to rationalize already existing likes and dislikes. Due to the arising of pleasant or unpleasant feelings, thoughts and as-

sociations are often coloured and influenced, resulting in a strong conditioning impact on views and opinions that only too often is not noticed.

The conditioning impact of feelings on experience and reactions is the central theme of dependent arising, *paṭicca samuppāda*, which highlights that craving, the main culprit for the *saṃsār*ic predicament, arises due to feeling. Hence insight is required at this junction, at the transition from feeling to craving. The development of such insight will be taken up in more detail in the next chapter on contemplation of feelings.

One who has reached the destruction of craving through full liberation has gone beyond the controlling power of feelings as well. Being devoid of passion towards any feeling, he or she has become a *vedagū*, a knower of feelings as well as a knower of the highest knowledge, *sabbavedanāsu vītarāgo sabbaṃ vedam aticca vedagū so* (Sn 529).

13. Contemplation of feelings / *Vedanānupassanā*

Due to the conditioning role of *vedanā* on craving, which constitutes an all-important junction in the twelve-link chain of dependent arising, *paṭicca samuppāda*, contemplation of feelings and of their conditioning impact on subsequent mental reactions has a central place in the early Buddhist analysis of reality. As highlighted by Ñāṇaponika (1983: 5), contemplation of feeling holds the intriguing potential of "breaking the chain of suffering at its weakest link".

In the present chapter, I will first explore the analysis of feelings given in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* (13.1), followed by turning to the relationship between feelings and mental reactions (13.2) and to the potential of contemplating feelings (13.3). In the final part, I will examine feelings and impermanence (13.4), and investigate the significance of *dukkha* (13.5).

13.1 The Analysis of Feelings

According to the instructions given in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*, contemplation of feeling requires clear awareness of the affective tone of any feeling as to whether it is "pleasant", *sukha*, "unpleasant", *dukkha*, or "neutral", *adukkhamasukha* (MN I 59). This basic division of feeling into three types is then to be further developed by distinguishing between "worldly" and "unworldly" manifestations of feelings, *sāmisa* and *nirāmisa*. In accordance with a mode of practice that is applied to any object of *satipaṭṭhāna*, contemplation of feelings comprises internal and external feelings, *ajjhatta / bahiddhā*, and focuses on their arising and passing away, *samudaya / vaya*, with the aim of dwelling independently and without clinging to anything, *anissito ca viharati na ca kiñci loke upādiyati*.

These rather succinct instructions cover considerable ground in the field of insight. The first step envisaged in the *satipaṭ-*

ṭhāna training scheme for contemplation of feelings is to clearly recognize the affective tone of present experience, and to stop at the bare experience of feeling itself, without giving room to any reaction.

Having stopped at the bare feeling itself, the experience of feelings should be observed from the perspective of their affective nature, without getting involved with the individual nature and characteristics of whatever feeling may have manifested at present, whether this be, for example, 'feeling an itch', or perhaps 'feeling thrilled', or whatever else. Instead of getting carried away by the individual content of felt experience, awareness should be directed to the general character of experience in terms of its three possible feeling tones.

The rationale behind this distinction of feelings into three affective types in terms of being pleasant, unpleasant or neutral can be understood in the light of the *Mahānidāna-sutta*, which points out that these three types of feeling are mutually exclusive (DN II 66). That is, at the time of experiencing one of these three, one does not experience any of the other two.

The implication of this dictum is that the ability to feel is not a compact unit, not something stable that at times feels pleasure and at other times displeasure. Instead, feelings are a process that consists of a series of mutually exclusive moments of felt experience. Hence the notion of an 'I' that feels or is identical with feeling turns out to be a thoroughly mistaken assumption. In this way, the distinction introduced during this first step of contemplation of feeling has considerable potential for bringing home the truth of not-self, *anattā*.

The next stage of practice, then, combines awareness of the affective tone of experience with mindfulness directed to its ethical context, expressed in terms of the distinction between worldly and unworldly feelings. The purpose behind this distinction is to draw awareness to the all-important relationship

of feelings to the arising of wholesome or unwholesome mental reactions.

13.2 Feelings and Mental Reactions

A discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* approaches this topic from the perspective of the underlying tendencies, the *anusaya*s. This discourse explains that in relation to pleasant feeling the underlying tendency to passion should be abandoned; in relation to unpleasant feeling the underlying tendency to aversion should be abandoned; and in relation to neutral feeling the tendency to delusion should be abandoned (SN IV 205). The same discourse emphasizes that the activation of the underlying tendencies is in each case related to a lack of clearly knowing the respective feeling, *vedanam appajānato*. This discourse thereby uses precisely the same vocabulary as employed in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*'s description of contemplation of feeling, which enjoins to clearly know the feeling that is felt at present, '*... vedanaṃ vediyāmī 'ti pajānāti* (MN I 59).

This parallelism makes it clear that the antidote required in regard to the activation of the underlying tendencies is mindful observation of the nature of any feeling that has arisen. Developing mindfulness in this way has an intriguing potential of becoming aware and eventually even stopping the reaction to any feeling even before this reaction has started.

Contemplation of feeling needs to be undertaken comprehensively and continuously in order to eventually be able to nip the reaction in the bud, accomplished through clear awareness of the impending onset of unwholesome thoughts and emotions at their point of origin in *vedanā*. Here a special effort is required for contemplating feelings even when the mind is carried off by sensual fantasies, thoughts of aversion, or vain imaginings. Feelings arisen at such times are obviously worldly types of feeling, and to wisely contemplate them is the very

means for breaking through their conditioning impact on the mind.

The need for continuity of practice is also implicit in the above-mentioned *Saṃyutta-nikāya* discourse, which continues by indicating that practice should be undertaken diligently and without loss of clear comprehension, *ātāpī sampajaññaṃ na riñcati*. These two terms also feature prominently in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* and thus further underline the close relationship of the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* passage with mindfulness practice. Through contemplation undertaken in this way, the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* discourse concludes, a wise practitioner will thoroughly comprehend feelings and reach freedom from the influxes, *tato so vedanā sabbā, parijānāti paṇḍito, so vedanā pariññāya, diṭṭhe dhamme anāsavo.*

The need to direct awareness to the additional distinction between worldly and unworldly feelings, introduced in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*, is required in order to detect which manifestation of pleasant, unpleasant or neutral feelings is related to the underlying tendencies. The *Cūḷavedalla-sutta* explains that the joy and equanimity of deep concentration, as well as the sadness of not having reached liberation, are experiences of feelings that do not activate the underlying tendencies to passion, aversion, or ignorance (MN I 303).

The distinction between worldly and unworldly feelings recurs in the *Saḷāyatanavibhaṅga-sutta* under the heading of feelings related to the household life, *gehasita*, and feelings related to renunciation, *nekkhamasita*. (MN III 217). The *Saḷāyatanavibhaṅga-sutta* explains that in the case of feelings of joy, *somanassa*, the type of joy that is related to the household life arises due to the pleasing and agreeable features of sense-objects. Joy related to renunciation, however, arises when contemplating the impermanent and unsatisfactory nature of sense-objects.

In the case of feelings of displeasure or sadness, *domanassa*, those related to the household life manifest when hankering for unobtainable sense-objects, whereas sadness related to renunciation occurs when generating longing for liberation.

Finally neutral feelings related to the household life are merely the outcome of the bland features of sense-objects, whose nature is such that it does not call up any particular interest or reaction. In contrast, neutral feelings related to renunciation are the result of equanimity gained through insight into the impermanent and unsatisfactory nature of sense-objects. Hence the type of feeling that is related to the household life is due to the nature of the objects of the senses, whereas a feeling related to renunciation goes beyond and transcends the limitations of the object it experiences.

The *Chachakka-sutta* explains that it is impossible to make an end of *dukkha* unless the underlying tendencies in relation to each of the three types of feeling are overcome (MN III 285). Those who engage in practicing accordingly, by not allowing the mind to attach to pleasant feelings, or to get frustrated when unpleasant feelings arise, and by developing clear understanding of the true nature of neutral feelings, will reach final liberation. The discourse concludes by reporting that sixty monks reached liberation while this instruction was given, a telling testimony to the efficacy of developing detachment towards feelings.

13.3 The Potential of Contemplating Feelings

The potential of contemplation of feelings is also highlighted in a discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, which points out that one who develops full detachment in regard to the three types of feeling will make an end of *dukkha* here and now (AN V 51). This potential is perhaps not surprising in view of the relationship of feeling to craving in the account of the condi-

tioned genesis of *dukkha* given in the twelve-link presentation of dependent arising, *paṭicca samuppāda*.

The perspective offered by this crucial conditioning link between feelings and craving could be related to the beginning section of the same twelve-link series (see SN III 96), according to which the perpetuation of the *saṃsār*ic predicament is due to formations, *saṅkhāra*s, that are rooted in ignorance, *avijjā*. This makes it unmistakeably clear that the presence of mindfulness and equanimity in regard to the impending reaction towards the experience of feeling is of outstanding significance for progress on the path to liberation.

The theme of remaining aloof from reacting to feelings recurs in the *Mahāsaḷāyatanika-sutta* in an exposition on six sense-door experiences. This discourse proclaims that by staying aloof from infatuation in regard to any of the sense-organs, in regard to their respective sense-objects, and in regard to the feelings that arise in dependence on the organ and its objects, one is actually undertaking the noble eightfold path. The view, intention, effort, mindfulness and concentration of one who practices like this naturally become right view, right intention, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration (MN III 289).

The *Mahāsaḷāyatanika-sutta* adds that the remaining three path factors - speech, action and livelihood - would have to be purified earlier. According to the same discourse, one who develops the noble eightfold path in this way thereby also covers all four *satipaṭṭhāna*s, as well as the other qualities related to awakening, *bodhipakkhiya dhamma*. Practising in this way one develops *samatha* and *vipassanā* in conjunction, a development that leads to knowledge and liberation, *vijjā* and *vimutti.* Hence all the central aspects of the early Buddhist path to liberation could be covered and developed through this particular mode of practice.

13.4 Feelings and Impermanence

According to the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*, once mindfulness has been directed to a clear recognition of the basic triad of feeling types and to their distinction into worldly and unworldly types, actual contemplation requires directing awareness to the arising and passing away of any kind of feeling, be they internal or external. This introduces the perhaps most crucial insight perspective on feelings, namely clear awareness of their impermanent nature.

A discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* treats contemplation of the impermanent nature of feelings under the heading of the maxim that "all things are not worth sticking to", *sabbe dhammā nālaṃ abhinivesāya* (AN IV 88). According to its explanation, someone intent on practising in this way should contemplate any of the three types of feelings as impermanent, as fading away, as ceasing, and as [something to be] relinquished, *anicca, virāga, nirodha, paṭinissagga*.

This presentation points to a progression of the practice, where contemplating impermanence leads to awareness of the disappearance of feelings, in terms of their passing away and cessation. This enshrines a crucial aspect of the development of insight. By emphasizing the disappearance facet of the experience of impermanence, this slight shift of perspective during contemplation brings about a deepening of the process of relinquishing any attachment to feelings and thereby issues in dispassion, another nuance of the term *virāga*, heralding the deepening of insight into the ultimately unsatisfactory nature of all felt experience.

Ñāṇaponika (1983: 5) explains that "when in insight meditation the vanishing moment of feelings becomes more strongly marked, the impermanent nature of the feelings will impress itself very deeply on the meditator's mind. This experience ... will gradually mature into the Insight Knowledge of Dissolu-

tion, *bhaṅga-ñāṇa*. On reaching that stage, the meditator will find himself well on the road to further progress".

The above quoted discourse from the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* indicates that one who practices in this way will not grasp at anything in this world, *na ca kiñci loke upādiyati*. This expression links the present description to the instructions in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*. The need to avoid any grasping would also be implicit in the detailed examination of feelings in the *Mahādukkhakkhandha-sutta*, which highlights that the impermanent, unsatisfactory and changing nature of feelings are their main disadvantage or draw-back, *ādīnava* (MN I 90).

Feelings do provide satisfaction, undeniably, and the joy and pleasure one may feel is the gratification, *assāda*, that can be derived from them. Yet, in view of their impermanent nature, the only true solution, *nissaraṇa*, in relation to feeling is to give up all desire and passion for them. Only such giving up will enable one to dwell independently, in accordance with the *satipaṭṭhāna* instructions, without grasping at anything in the world.

A detailed perspective on the implications of the changing nature of each of the three types of feeling comes to the fore in the *Cūḷavedalla-sutta*, which indicates that pleasant feeling is pleasant as long as it lasts, but causes displeasure once it changes, *sukhā vedanā ṭhitisukhā vipariṇāmadukkhā* (MN I 303). Unpleasant feeling in turn is displeasing as long as it lasts, but its change is experienced as pleasant, *dukkhā vedanā ṭhitidukkhā vipariṇāmasukhā*; while neutral feeling is pleasurable when known, but unpleasant when not known, *adukkhamasukhā vedanā ñāṇa-sukhā aññāṇa-dukkhā.*

The last case indicates that neutral feeling, though in itself hedonically neutral, during actual contemplation can be experienced as a pleasurable object of meditation, a pleasure derived from the presence of knowledge. Outside of a meditative con-

text, however, neutral feelings may be experienced by someone without awareness as simply 'boring', and such boredom can become a strong motivating force to search for sensual diversion.

13.5 The Significance of Dukkha

Another and rather crucial aspect of the *Cūḷavedalla-sutta*'s presentation is that not only will pleasant feelings eventually cause the experience of unpleasantness, once they change and become otherwise, but unpleasant feelings can cause the pleasure of relief once they change and disappear. This perspective is significant in so far as it provides a necessary background to the statement that whatever is felt is included within *dukkha*, *yaṃ kiñci vedayitaṃ taṃ dukkhasmiṃ* (SN II 53).

Much hinges on a proper translation of the term *dukkha* in such a context. If one were to opt for the most commonly used translation of *dukkha* as "suffering", this passage would propose that all felt experience is to be included under the heading of 'suffering'. In the light of the above passage from the *Cūḷavedalla-sutta*, such a conclusion would meet with difficulties, since though the presence of unpleasant feelings may be experienced as 'suffering', the presence of pleasant feelings is certainly not experienced as 'suffering', and the two are, according to the dictum of the *Mahānidāna-sutta*, mutually exclusive experiences.

When the future change of both feelings is considered, one could attribute the qualification 'suffering' to pleasant feeling, as its change leads to displeasure. Yet, in order to appropriately treat the effects of future change, one would also have to take into consideration the change of unpleasant feeling, and such a change, as the *Cūḷavedalla-sutta* clarifies, is experienced as pleasant and not as 'suffering'.

Hence the *Cūḷavedalla-sutta*'s presentation reveals the limitations of the translation "suffering", making it advisable to

adopt a different translation of the term *dukkha* in such a context. An alternative would be, for example, the term "unsatisfactory". Though pleasant feeling is pleasant while it lasts, it is still unsatisfactory, precisely because it does not last forever. According to another passage, this is in fact the implication of the dictum that whatever is felt is included within *dukkha*, namely that all felt experience is unsatisfactory, however pleasant it may be at present, because it does not last (SN IV 216).

According to an instruction given in the *Itivuttaka*, the unsatisfactory nature of feelings needs to be contemplated in particular in relation to pleasant feelings. In the case of unpleasant feeling, their afflictive nature should be attended to. When contemplating neutral feelings, impermanence should be given importance (It 47; cf. also SN IV 207).

Due to their affectively bland nature, neutral feelings are the most difficult to contemplate of the three types of feeling and may easily be mistaken for a continuously present background against which pleasant and unpleasant feelings manifest. Closer inspection, however, reveals that even the comparatively subtle experience of neutral feelings is marked by the characteristic of impermanence and change. Comprehensive practice undertaken in this manner has an outstanding potential of issuing in liberating insight.

One who has reached liberation will be thoroughly detached in regard to any feeling, endowed with the clear understanding that whatever is felt is impermanent and not worth any delight (MN III 244). He or she clearly understands that the feelings that are felt are limited to the body, and with the dissolution of the body all feeling will simply become cool, *kāyassa bhedā ... sabbavedayitāni ... sītibhavissanti*.

14. Happiness / *Sukha*

The significance of the Pāli term *sukha*, besides qualifying feelings as being "pleasant", stands for various levels of a "happy" state of mind. The significance of *sukha* in the form of various types of happiness recognized and valued in early Buddhism can easily be underestimated. A close survey of the Pāli discourses, however, brings to light that the development of appropriate states of happiness forms an important aspect of the early Buddhist path to liberation (see also Premasiri 1981). Thus an entire chapter of the *Dhammapada* is dedicated to the topic of *sukha* (Dhp 197 - 208), and references to the experience of happiness are a recurring theme in the verses of awakened monks and nuns collected in the *Theragāthā* and the *Therīgāthā*.

In order to explore the significance of *sukha* in the Pāli discourses, I will begin by examining different types of happiness (14.1), followed by turning to the ethical perspective on happiness (14.2) and the relationship between happiness and the development of the mind (14.3).

14.1 Types of Happiness

The distinction of pleasant feelings into "worldly", *sāmisa*, and "unworldly", *nirāmisa*, types (MN I 59) can similarly be applied to forms of happiness. Worldly manifestations of happiness, *sāmisa sukha*, arise in relation to sensual pleasure. Unworldly forms of happiness, *nirāmisa sukha*, arise during absorption. More unworldly than unworldly types of happiness, *nirāmisā nirāmisatara sukha*, represent the pleasure experi-

enced by *arahant*s when reviewing their mental freedom from defilements (SN IV 235).

The same basic distinction between worldly and unworldly types of happiness can be seen to underlie a set of analytical schemes applied to *sukha*. These contrast the happiness of lay life, *gihisukha*, to the happiness of the life of one gone forth, *pabbajitasukha*; or else sensual happiness, *kāmasukha*, to non-sensual happiness, *nekkhammasukha*; or again happiness that is with attachment, *upadhisukha*, to happiness free from attachment, *nirupadhisukha*; or happiness related to the influxes, *sāsavasukha*, to happiness not related to the influxes, *anāsavasukha*; or happiness that is noble, *ariya*, to happiness that is ignoble, *anariya* (AN I 80).

Other distinctions of happiness are related to the development of deeper levels of concentration, contrasting the happiness that arises together with bliss, *sappītika*, to that without bliss, *nippītika*; or happiness associated with pleasure, *sātasukha*, to happiness associated with equanimity, *upekkhāsukha*; or happiness derived from concentration, *samādhisukha*, to happiness not derived from concentration, *asamādhisukha*; or else happiness that has a form as its object, *rūpārammaṇa sukha*, to happiness that has a formless object, *arūpārammaṇa sukha* (AN I 81).

These analytical schemes highlight two aspects in relation to happiness. One fundamental distinction involves the basic contrast between wholesome and unwholesome types of happiness, a contrast that also underlies the distinction between worldly and unworldly types of happiness. In addition to this more ethically oriented form of analysis, the above listed instances also draw attention to a successive refinement of happiness during deeper stages of concentration.

Both aspects are of central importance in relation to *sukha* and build on each other, the first indicating what should be de-

veloped and avoided, while the second depicts a progressive refinement of what is to be developed. These two complementary perspectives on happiness – distinguishing between unwholesome and wholesome types and treating the stages of development of its wholesome manifestations – run like a red thread through the entire compass of the teachings in the Pāli discourses, from instructions on basic morality through the path of mental purification all the way up to full awakening.

14.2 The Ethical Perspective on Happiness

According to a discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, the Buddha emphatically proclaimed that, if it were not possible to develop and do what is wholesome, and if developing what is wholesome would not lead to happiness, he would not ask his disciples to undertake such development. But because it is possible and does lead to happiness, he instructed his disciples to develop and do what is wholesome (AN I 58).

Happiness, another discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* asserts, is not achieved by mere wishing. Those who want happiness have to undertake the path that leads to happiness, *sukhasaṃvattanikā paṭipadā* (AN III 48). The path to happiness, however, requires a long-term perspective, a perspective based on the awareness that what yields happiness right away may be conducive to future happiness or to future suffering, depending on its ethical quality.

One who harms others, and thereby destroys their happiness, will himself or herself subsequently not be able to achieve happiness (Dhp 131). In contrast, conduct that does not harm oneself or others is conduct that results in happiness, *sukhavipāka* (MN II 115). A wise person, who maintains moral conduct, will experience the happiness of blamelessness in the present life and happiness of a fortunate rebirth as a future reward for his or her wholesome conduct (MN III 171 and It 67). Just as moral restraint – such as abstaining from killing, theft etc. –

will lead to future happiness, so will indulging in immoral activities inevitably result in future suffering. Hence to maintain virtuous conduct and to avoid evil is a fundamental condition for achieving happiness (Dhp 333). One who thus acts in accordance with the *Dhamma*, a *dhammacārī*, will fare happily in this world and the next (Dhp 169).

Several discourses reflect a very practical sense of happiness. Considering happiness from the perspective of a man in the world, these passages depict four types of happiness that a householders can expect from rightfully undertaking their livelihood (AN II 69): the happiness of acquiring wealth by their own effort, *atthisukha*; the happiness of using this wealth to give pleasure to themselves and to do meritorious deeds, *bhogasukha*; the happiness of being free from debt, *anaṇasukha*; and the happiness of being free from blame, *anavajjasukha*.

Those who use rightly gained wealth in a proper way bring happiness to themselves and others (AN II 67). To support those worthy of support, in particular one's mother and father, as well as recluses and Brahmins, is a source of happiness (Dhp 332). By giving food to monks and recluses one gives happiness, and therefore will gain happiness in return (AN III 42). Hence merit is but another name for happiness (It 15).

The main wellspring of happiness lies, however, in the training of the mind, which is the true source of happiness. No other thing is as conducive to happiness as a mind that is well trained and developed (AN I 6). As the famous twin verses standing at the opening of the *Dhammapada* declare, one who acts or speaks with a pure mind will be followed by happiness just like a shadow (Dhp 2).

To train the mind requires, however, a re-evaluation of happiness. The *Mahādukkhakkhandha-sutta* readily acknowledges that to indulge in sensuality does produce feelings of pleasure, which constitutes the aspect of gratification of sensual pleas-

ures, *kāmānaṃ assādo* (MN I 85). Yet, against this gratification stand their multiple disadvantages. Though pleasant feelings may cause happiness as long as they last, their changing nature inevitably spells dissatisfaction (MN I 303).

Sensual happiness is not only ephemeral, it also has undesirable after-effects that outweigh the pleasure obtained. The *Mahādukkhakkhandha-sutta* vividly depicts the multifarious problems resulting from the pursuit of sensual pleasures, showing that criminality and warfare can, ultimately, be traced back to desire for sensual gratification (MN I 87).

Another problem with the pursuit of sensual types of happiness is that gratification results in strengthening desires, a predicament comparable to a leper cauterising his wounds over a fire (MN I 507). Though the leper will experience momentary pleasure, the act of cauterisation causes the wounds to become more infected and thus inevitably leads to a deterioration of the leper's condition. In a similar way, the more beings indulge in sensual pleasure, the more they will burn with sensual desire, a vicious cycle turning into a bottomless vortex of ever greater desires clamouring for satisfaction.

Thus the happiness gained through sensual pleasures, if examined from a long-term perspective, turns out to be spurious. Beings indulging in sensuality suffer from a perceptual distortion, *saññāvipallāsa*, which causes them to attribute happiness to what on proper examination turns out to be otherwise (AN II 52).

A thorough re-assessment of the nature of happiness underlies the dictum that "what others call happiness, the noble ones call unsatisfactory", *yaṃ pare sukhato āhu, tad ariyā āhu dukkhato* (Sn 762). From the perspective of such re-assessment, sensual pleasures will be seen as a form of "happiness" that is "filthy" or even "dung-like", *mīḷhasukha*, a "lowly happiness",

puthujjanasukha, and thus an "ignoble happiness", *anariya-sukha*, which is better avoided (MN I 454).

A motivation for a reorientation against the powerful pull of sensual desires can be found in the reflection that it is reasonable to give up a smaller happiness, if thereby a greater and superior happiness can be gained (Dhp 290). According to the *Araṇavibhaṅga-sutta*, the Buddha openly invited his disciples to find out what really constitutes true happiness and, based on this understanding, to pursue it, *sukhavinicchayaṃ jaññā, sukhavinicchayaṃ ñatvā ajjhattaṃ sukham anuyuñjeyya* (MN III 230).

The above injunction to find out what really constitutes happiness refers in particular to the happiness experienced with deeper states of concentration, a form of happiness far superior to sensual pleasures. Such happiness is a "divine happiness", *dibba sukha*, with which all interest in the vulgar happiness of sensuality ceases (MN I 504). Such divine happiness is moreover the "happiness of renunciation", *nekkhammasukha*, and the "happiness of seclusion", *pavivekasukha*. It is a "peaceful [type] of happiness", *upasamasukha*, and a type of "happiness [that leads] to awakening", *sambodhasukha*, which should be pursued and developed (MN I 454). Since all beings are desirous of happiness, *sukhakāmā hi devā manussā* (DN II 269), the crucial point is thus to skilfully redirect this natural tendency in such a way as to lead to real happiness.

14.3 Happiness and the Development of the Mind

The injunction to develop and pursue noble forms of happiness points to a gradual refinement of happiness through the practice of the path. The function and importance of happiness as a means for progress on the path appears to have been a direct outcome of the Buddha's own experience when he was still in search of liberation.

According to the *Bodhirājakumāra-sutta*, before his awakening the Buddha himself had accepted the belief common in ancient India that all pleasures have to be shunned in order to be able to reach liberation (MN II 93). The *Mahāsaccaka-sutta* reports that after his ascetic practices had proved fruitless, the Buddha-to-be remembered the happiness of a deep state of concentration experienced at an earlier stage of his life. Reflecting on this experience, he asked himself: "Why am I afraid of a happiness that is aloof from sensuality and unwholesomeness?", *kinnu kho ahaṃ tassa sukhassa bhāyāmi, yaṃ taṃ sukhaṃ aññatr'eva kāmehi aññatra akusalehi dhammehi?* He then came to the conclusion: "I am not afraid of such a type of happiness!", *na kho ahaṃ tassa sukhassa bhāyāmi* (MN I 246).

The realisation that happiness need not be avoided, since the type of happiness experienced during deeper states of concentration is a wholesome and recommendable form of happiness, marked a decisive turning point in his quest for liberation.

The Buddha's newly found attitude to happiness stood in stark contrast to his ascetic contemporaries, a contrast highlighted in the *Cūḷadukkhakkhandha-sutta*. This discourse presents the Buddha in discussion with other ascetics, who believed that future happiness requires undergoing self-inflicted suffering. Their discussion ended with the Buddha making the humorous point that, in contrast to the pain they experienced through undertaking self-mortification, he was able to experience happiness continuously for seven days. Hence his experience of happiness was superior even to the happiness available to the king of the country (MN I 94).

In a similar vein, awakened monks and nuns extol their experience of happiness achieved through successful practice of the path. Thus Sāmaññakāni affirms that, if practice is undertaken properly, one who seeks happiness will obtain it, *sukhaṃ sukhattho labhate* (Th 35). Pakkha proclaims that he has reached happiness through happiness, *sukhen'anvāgataṃ su-*

khaṃ (Th 63); just as Aṅgaṇikabhāradvāja has obtained happiness through happiness, *sukhena sukhaṃ laddhaṃ* (Th 220). Ekavihāri rejoices in the happiness of liberation, *vimuttisukhena sukhito ramissāmi* (Th 545). The former brigand Aṅgulimāla now lives happily, whether lying down or standing, *sukhaṃ sayāmi ṭhāyāmi, sukhaṃ kappemi jīvitaṃ* (Th 888). The nun Sumaṅgalamātā meditates happily thinking 'oh happiness', *'aho sukhan'ti sukhato jhāyāmi*. (Thī 24).

The early Buddhist monks and nuns delighted in their way of life, so much so that a visiting king described them as "smiling and cheerful, sincerely joyful and plainly delighting, living at ease and unruffled" (MN II 121).

As explicitly indicated in the *Devadaha-sutta*, effort is fruitful in the case of those who do not give up the happiness that accords with the *Dhamma*, *dhammikañca sukhaṃ na pariccajati ... evam pi saphalo upakkamo hoti saphalaṃ padhānaṃ* (MN II 223). The rationale behind such a statement is not merely a higher form of hedonism, but the very reason that the development of wholesome happiness constitutes a crucially important factor for progress on the path. That is, spiritual happiness has a clearly delineated function in the early Buddhist path scheme.

From this perspective it becomes increasingly clear why the arising of a Buddha and his teaching of the *Dhamma* are a source of happiness (Dhp 194), and why the motivation behind the teaching activity of a Buddha and his disciples is the happiness of gods and men (SN I 105) - simply because by teaching the *Dhamma* they teach the path to true happiness.

Several discourses indicate that the development of wisdom and the achievement of realisation depend on developing happiness. These discourses depict a conditional sequence that begins with "delight", *pāmojja*, and leads via "bliss", *pīti*, and tranquillity to the arising of "happiness", *sukha*. Based on the

presence of happiness, concentration naturally arises, which in turn forms the basis for wisdom and realisation. The dynamics of this causal sequence is comparable to the natural course of rain falling on a hilltop, which gradually fills the rivulets and rivers, and finally flows down to the sea (SN II 32). Once spiritual happiness is present, there is no need to wish for the mind to become concentrated and wisdom to arise, since this will naturally happen as a matter of course (AN V 3).

The *Kandaraka-sutta* reveals that during the gradual path of training a progressive refinement of spiritual happiness takes place (MN I 346). The first stage of this ascending series is the happiness due to blamelessness, *anavajjasukha*, a happiness that results from maintaining moral conduct. Such happiness due to blamelessness will grow further once a frugal life style and contentment become additional contributing facts. Contentment, according to a *Dhammapada* verse, is itself a source of happiness (Dhp 331).

The next stage of happiness envisaged in the *Kandaraka-sutta* comes from leaving sensual distractions behind by practising sense-restraint. This type of happiness is "unimpaired happiness", *abyāsekasukha*, since the bondage of sensuality has temporarily been left behind. A discourse in the *Itivuttaka* adds that knowing measure with food and practising sense-restraint lead to happiness of the body, *kāyasukha*, and happiness of the mind, *cetosukha* (It 24).

The description in the *Kandaraka-sutta* continues from the unimpaired happiness due to freedom from sensual distraction to the different types of happiness experienced with deepening levels of concentration. These are the "bliss and happiness of seclusion", *vivekajaṃ pītisukhaṃ*, the "bliss and happiness of concentration", *samādhijaṃ pītisukhaṃ*, and the "happy dwelling in equanimity and mindfulness", *upekkhako satimā sukhavihārī*, of the first, second and third *jhāna* respectively. Such

types of happiness testify to the fact that diligent practice of meditation is indeed a source of pure happiness (Dhp 27).

This holds good not only for the development of tranquillity, but also for the practice of insight meditation. Contemplating with right wisdom the impermanent nature of phenomena is a source of joy (MN III 217), and to see the rise and fall of the five aggregates can lead to delight and bliss (Dhp 374). The rapture of rightly contemplating the *Dhamma* transcends worldly types of rapture (Dhp 373), so much so that even listening to the most refined type of music cannot compare with it (Th 398 and Th 1071).

In fact, though the Buddha's teaching of the four noble truths places much emphasis on *dukkha*, the third and the fourth noble truth are actually concerned with the positive values of freedom from *dukkha* and the practical path that leads to that freedom. Thus insight into the four noble truths is not a matter of sadness and despair, because such insight will be accompanied by happiness and joy (SN V 441).

The further the path has been developed, the deeper the happiness becomes. Hence it comes as no surprise that the culmination of the successive stages of happiness described in the *Kandaraka-sutta* is the happiness that comes with liberation, when one has become truly stilled and cool within, *nibbuto sītibhūto sukhapaṭisaṃvedī* (MN I 349). The eradication of defilements is a well-spring of happiness indeed (DN I 196).

A complementary presentation of a progressive series of types of happiness can be found in the *Bahuvedanīya-sutta*, which takes into account not only the four *jhāna*s, but also the four immaterial attainments. Notably, this discourse reckons the four immaterial attainments also as types of happiness, even though with such sublime levels of concentration, "feelings" of happiness are left behind.

The culmination of this progressive series in the *Bahuvedanīya-sutta* is the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling (MN I 400). This is reckoned to be a form of happiness superior to the other types of happiness mentioned earlier. Though it might seem contradictory to speak of happiness when all feelings have ceased, according to this discourse, the Buddha clarified that his conception of *sukha* was not limited to the experience of feeling.

A similar perspective on happiness recurs in those discourses which declare *Nibbāna* to be the highest form of happiness (MN I 508 and Dhp 203). Asked how *Nibbāna* could be considered as happiness, since with *Nibbāna* all feelings cease, Sāriputta readily replies that it is precisely the cessation of feeling which causes happiness (AN IV 415).

With these passages, the two main meanings of the term *sukha* - "pleasant" feeling and a "happy" state of mind - no longer coexist. By presenting the cessation of feeling as supreme forms of happiness, the culminating point of the early Buddhist conception of *sukha* transcends the entire range of felt experience.

From the lofty viewpoint of such transcendence, the attitude to pleasant feeling changes thoroughly. An *arahant* no longer delights in pleasant feelings or clings to them, but experiences them with detachment and wisdom (SN II 82). What attraction could they hold for one who knows the destruction of craving, a happiness superior to any mundane or divine form of happiness, the happiness of liberation?

15. Equanimity / *Upekkhā*

The term *upekkhā*, "equanimity", is derived from *upa* and *īkṣ*, and thus conveys a basic sense of "looking upon". In order to explore the various aspects of such 'looking on' through *upekkhā*, I will begin by considering equanimity towards sensory experience (15.1), followed by turning to the role of equanimity as a divine abode (15.2), and as a factor of awakening (15.3), also evaluating its role in regard to the development of insight and in regard to the attainment of absorption.

15.1 Equanimity towards Sensory Experience

Equanimity as the expression of a detached attitude towards sense-experience is described in a discourse in the *Aṅgutttara-nikāya*. According to this discourse, a monk becomes worthy of respect and offerings if he is neither elated, *sumana*, nor depressed, *dumana*, in regard to what is experienced through the six senses, but instead dwells with equanimity, mindfulness and clear comprehension, *upekkhako viharati sato sampajāno* (AN III 279).

Such an inner attitude of equanimity towards sense-objects is the outcome of a gradual training. According to the *Indriya-bhāvanā-sutta*, some contemporaries of the Buddha were of the opinion that the way to deal with the attraction of sense-objects is to just avoid them. From the perspective of the Buddha, however, the proper procedure is rather to see sense-experience, whether agreeable or disagreeable, as something that is gross and conditioned. In contrast to such gross and conditioned experience, equanimity is peaceful and sublime (MN III

299). This conveys a sense of inner distance towards experience that enables maintaining balance with whatever occurs.

The same discourse then describes how to arrive at mastery in regard to sense-experience. According to this description, one trains to perceive what is "disagreeable", *paṭikkula*, as "agreeable", *appaṭikkula*, and what is agreeable as disagreeable, followed by perceiving both as disagreeable, and then both as agreeable. The final stage in such training is reached when the labels "disagreeable" and "agreeable" are left behind and one is able to dwell in equanimity, endowed with mindfulness and clear comprehension in regard to any experience (MN III 301).

It is noteworthy that the *Indriyabhāvanā-sutta*, just as the above *Aṅguttara-nikāya* passage, should present equanimity in conjunction with mindfulness and clear comprehension This highlights the close relationship between equanimity and those qualities of the mind that stand for a full apperception of the situation at hand and for the presence of wisdom.

The *Saḷāyatana-sutta* distinguishes between worldly types of equanimity, *gehasitā upekkhā*, experienced by ignorant worldlings towards sense-objects, and equanimity based on renunciation, *nekkhammasitā upekkhā*, which arises as the result of awareness of the impermanent and unsatisfactory nature of sense-objects (MN III 219). The worldly forms of equanimity result from the object itself, whose features arouse neither a positive nor a negative reaction. In contrast, equanimity based on renunciation transcends its object, *ativattati*, as this equanimity is caused by an inner attitude, not by the outer features of the object.

The discourses often refer to the felt experience of equanimity under the heading of the "faculty of equanimity", *upekkhindriyā*. This faculty covers what is bodily and mentally experi-

enced as neither comfortable nor uncomfortable, *n'eva sātaṃ nāsātaṃ vedayitaṃ* (SN V 211).

The faculty of equanimity is one of five such faculties. The other four are the faculties of bodily pleasure, *sukha*, bodily pain, *dukkha*, mental joy, *somanassa*, and mental displeasure, *domanassa* (SN V 209). While the faculties of bodily pleasure and mental joy correspond to pleasant feeling, *sukhā vedanā*; the faculty of bodily pain and mental displeasure correspond to unpleasant feeling, *dukkhā vedanā*; and the faculty of equanimity corresponds to neutral, or more literally to "neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant feeling", *adukkhamasukhā vedanā* (SN V 210). The other four faculties cease progressively with the attainment of the four *jhānas*, whereas the faculty of equanimity ceases only with the attainment of the cessation of perceptions and feelings, *saññāvedayitanirodha* (SN V 215).

A related type of presentation includes *upekkhā* in a list of six elements, *dhātu*, of which the first four are again *sukha, dukkha, somanassa,* and *domanassa*, while the remainder are *upekkhā* and "ignorance", *avijjā* (MN III 62).

15.2 Equanimity as a Divine Abode

To remain equanimous is not only an important stage in perceptual mastery, but is also of considerable advantage in relation to other beings, where equanimity functions as one of the four divine abodes, the *brahmavihāra*s. In the standard description of the practice of the four divine abodes as forms of "liberation of the mind", *cetovimutti*, equanimity comes last (e.g. DN I 251). It thus appears to constitute the culmination point of the practice. This much can be deduced from the fact that in other similar listings, which cover the four *jhāna*s or the four immaterial attainments, the last in the series comes as a climax and builds on those mentioned earlier.

Understood in this way, equanimity as a divine abode constitutes the climax of a process that is based on the development of loving kindness, *mettā*, compassion, *karuṇā*, and sympathetic joy, *muditā*. This clearly shows that equanimity is not simply a state of listless lack of concern, but rather a mental state that rounds off a systematic opening of the heart, in the sense of being a "complement to the first three more concerned dispositions" (Aronson 1986: 89). That is, "joy and impartiality further intensify and extend the scope and power of love and compassion"(Stoler Miller 1979: 210). Instead of being merely a state of dull indifference, such equanimity is "the result of ... deliberate training, not the casual outcome of a passing mood" (Ñāṇaponika 1993: 16).

That equanimity comes last in the listing of the divine abodes "does not mean that equanimity is to supplant the first three sublime attitudes in one's future practice" (Aronson 1979: 8). Much rather, future practice will involve all four divine abodes, not being confined to practice of equanimity alone. This much becomes evident from a verse in the *Sutta-nipāta*, which implies such continuity (Sn 73).

That from an early Buddhist perspective equanimity is not considered as invariably superior to the other divine abodes can be seen in a passage in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*. This passage reports that Sāriputta was publicly contradicted several times by another monk. The Buddha finally intervened and upbraided the other monks for not intervening earlier (AN III 194). Why, he asked, did they not have compassion when a senior monk was being vexed in public, and instead continued to look on with equanimity? This passage shows that in early Buddhism equanimity was not considered as the appropriate response to every situation. Instead, at times an active intervention is required and should be undertaken, out of compassion.

The same is also reflected in another passage in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, which reports a visitor to the Buddha proposing that to refrain completely from criticizing others is the best attitude, as this would be a superior expression of equanimity (AN II 101). The Buddha disagreed with this proposal, explaining that one should criticize on those occasions where this is suitable.

The same issue is taken up from a complementary perspective in another discourse, which recommends admonishing someone even if this leads to vexation for oneself and for the other, as long as there is hope that the other will thereby become established in what is wholesome (MN II 241). Equanimity towards this person comes in as the appropriate attitude only if it can be anticipated that it will be impossible to establish the other in what is wholesome.

These passages clearly show that early Buddhism did not consider equanimity as the only appropriate attitude towards others, but rather saw it as an attitude that, in spite of its many advantages, may not always be appropriate. In fact, equanimity can be of two types, as some forms of equanimity lead to an increase of wholesome states, while other manifestations of equanimity lead to an increase of unwholesome states (DN II 279). For this reason, certain types of equanimity should not be developed.

In order to develop wholesome types of equanimity, the *Mahāhatthipadopama-sutta* recommends calling to mind the famous simile of the saw. With the help of such recollection, it becomes possible to generate "equanimity based on [what is] wholesome", *upekkhā kusalanissitā*, so that one will be able to bear even being attacked with fists, sticks and knives (MN I 186). Another recollection that can help to face even extreme situations can be elicited from the *Puṇṇovāda-sutta*. According to this discourse, the monk Puṇṇa was ready to bear any type of attack with the reflection that his aggressors were kind in

that they were not attacking him in ways even worse than what they were already doing (MN III 268).

These passages reveal the potential of equanimity in overcoming the tendency to irritation, *paṭigha* (MN I 424), or to anger, *āghāta* (AN III 185). In addition, equanimity developed as a liberation of the mind also becomes an antidote to passion, *rāga* (AN III 292). The relationship between equanimity and the removal of passion is further elaborated in another discourse, which explains that through developing the perception of absence of beauty, *asubhasaññā*, the attraction of sexuality will be replaced by equanimity (AN IV 47).

According to the *Jīvaka-sutta*, the Buddha's own practice of equanimity and of the other divine abodes had its foundation in his complete freedom from passion, anger and delusion (MN I 370). Due to the aloofness of the Buddha's equanimity from any defilement, his *brahmavihāra*, literally "Brahmic dwelling", was superior even to that of Brahmā.

A discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* indicates that for the Buddha the divine abode of equanimity or of any other *brahmavihāra* became a divine resting place (AN I 183). His equanimity as a teacher was such that, even when some disciples would not listen to his teachings, he would remain equanimous (MN III 221).

Apparently equanimity was a quality possessed by the Buddha already previous to his awakening. The *Mahāsīhanāda-sutta* describes a former time during which the bodhisattva was molested by cowherds who would spit at him, urinate on him, throw dirt at him and poke sticks into his ears (MN I 79). In spite of such harassment, he remained completely equanimous. According to the *Cariyapiṭaka*, in such adverse circumstances the bodhisattva developed his perfection of equanimity, *upekkhāpāramī* (Cp 102). Notably, in the list of ten perfections that according to the Theravāda tradition are required for future

Buddhahood, equanimity forms the culminating point, just as it does in the listing of the divine abodes. This thus again reflects the role of equanimity as a quality that rounds off a systematic development of mental qualities.

A discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* clarifies that the development of equanimity and of the other divine abodes should not be considered to be only a domain of Buddhists, as the same was also undertaken by contemporaries of the Buddha (SN V 116; see also Aronson 1984: 19). The same discourse throws into relief the decisive difference between their mode of practice and the way this was undertaken in the Buddha's dispensation. This difference lies in combining the practice of equanimity, or of any of the other divine abodes, with the development of the factors of awakening (SN V 120).

15.3 Equanimity as a Factor of Awakening

Similar to the position of equanimity in relation to the other divine abodes, in the context of the factors of awakening equanimity again constitutes the last in the listing. According to the *Ānāpānasati-sutta*, the factors of awakening arise in conditioned dependence on each other (MN III 85). This makes it clear that equanimity as a factor of awakening, *bojjhaṅga*, constitutes the climax of a process of meditative development that involves the previous establishment of mindfulness, *sati*, investigation-of-phenomena, *dhammavicaya*, energy, *viriya*, joy, *pīti*, tranquillity, *passaddhi*, and concentration, *samādhi*.

The *Ānāpānasati-sutta* indicates that the awakening factor of equanimity arises when one looks on with equanimity, *ajjhupekkhati*, at the concentrated state of mind that has been reached at this point of practice (MN III 86). The same *Ānāpānasati-sutta* speaks also of looking on with equanimity, *ajjhupekkhati*, in its description of contemplation of phenomena, *dhammānupassanā* (MN III 85). The discourse presents contemplating impermanence, dispassion, cessation and relin-

quishment when breathing in and breathing out as modes of practising contemplation of phenomena. In each case, a crucial requirement is that one looks on closely with equanimity, having left behind desire and discontent. In this way, the perspectives given on equanimity in the *Ānāpānasati-sutta* point to a mental balance that covers tranquillity as well as insight.

Equanimity as an awakening factor could be directed towards internal or towards external objects (SN V 111). To foster its development, attention should be given to things that are a basis for the awakening factor of equanimity, *upekkhāsambojjhaṅgaṭṭhāniyā dhammā* (SN V 67). Further explanation of this statement can be gathered from the commentaries, according to which one should in particular be detached towards people and things, avoid prejudiced people and associate with impartial people, and incline the mind towards the arousing and establishing of this particular factor of awakening (Ps I 299).

That equanimity as an awakening factor comes as the culmination of a development that has its foundation in mindfulness and investigation-of-phenomena reinforces a central point noted above in relation to sense-experience, where equanimity occurs in conjunction with mindfulness and clear comprehension. This close relationship of equanimity with clear discernment of a situation and the presence of wisdom is also reflected in a simile found in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya*, which compares the seven factors of awakening to the seven precious and magical possessions of a wheel-turning king. In the context of this simile, the awakening factor of equanimity corresponds to the king's adviser, *parināyaka*, a position that would obviously require a high degree of discernment and wisdom (SN V 99).

Further illustrations of equanimity in the sense of mental balance can be found in two similes that employ various parts of a chariot and of an elephant to illustrate mental qualities. Here equanimity keeps the burden loaded on the chariot in balance

(SN V 6), or else corresponds to the two parallel white teeth of the elephant (AN III 346 and Th 694).

Another simile describes how a goldsmith will at times simply look on with equanimity, *ajjhupekkhati*, after having alternately heated up gold and sprinkled it with water. Similarly, during the meditative development of the mind one should at times just give attention to the quality – literally "the sign" – of equanimity, *upekkhānimitta* (AN I 257). Nagao (1980: 249) draws attention to a passage in the *Saṃdhinirmocana*, where in the context of a similar exposition the sign of equanimity stands for 'effortlessness'.

The idea of balance between striving and laxity recurs in yet another imagery that illustrates the need for equanimous observation without interference with the example of a fire. Such a fire needs at times to be tended, at times needs to be quenched, and at times needs to be looked upon with equanimity (AN IV 45). For exertion to be fruitful, the *Devadaha-sutta* points out, one has to know not only when it is time to strive, but also when the time has come to simply remain with equanimity (MN II 223). As another discourse explains, one who does not look on with equanimity, when this is required, will not reach liberation (AN III 435).

Equanimity as a result of deepening insight is a central aspect of the progress towards liberation. A simile that illustrates how equanimity arises through insight can be found in the same *Devadaha-sutta*. This simile describes a man who sorely suffers on seeing the woman he loves conversing and laughing with another man. Yet, once this man realizes the cause of his distress and eventually overcomes his affection for the woman, her behaviour will no longer affect him (MN II 223).

The presence of equanimity and balance as an outcome of progressing insight is a recurrent theme in the discourses, though not always explicitly treated under the heading of *upek-*

khā. Another way of expressing the same state of mental balance and detachment would be, for example, the expression "he dwells independently, without clinging to anything in the world", *anissito ca viharati, na ca kiñci loke upādiyati* (e.g. MN I 56). Yet another example would be a maxim in the *Āneñjasappāya-sutta*, which describes the aspiration: "what exists, what has become, that I abandon", *yad atthi, yaṃ bhūtaṃ, tad pajahāmi* (MN II 265).

The same maxim recurs again in another discourse, according to which those who have developed wisdom, through putting this injunction into practice, will reach full awakening or become non-returners (AN IV 70). As the *Āneñjasappāya-sutta* points out, full liberation will be attained only if even the refined equanimity acquired with the help of the above maxim is not clung to.

A complementary description of the balanced attitude resulting from deeper insight can be found in the *Dhātuvibhaṅga-sutta.* This discourse indicates that, at such level of development, even feelings that intimate the approach of death will simply be experienced with a balanced mind, fortified with the knowledge that after death all feelings will simply become cool (MN III 244).

Besides being an outcome of the development of insight, equanimity also has an important role to play in relation to the development of tranquillity. The presence of equanimity is explicitly mentioned in the standard description of the third *jhāna*, during which one dwells in happiness and at the same time is equanimous and mindful, *upekhako satimā sukhavihārī* (DN I 75). During such attainment, a subtle but real perception of equanimity and happiness is present, *upekkhā-sukha-sukhuma-sacca-saññā* (DN I 183). It is the very presence of this equanimity and happiness that constitutes the last vestige of "perturbability", *iñjita*, during this attainment (MN I 454), or else the last vestige of "confinement", *sambādha* (AN IV 450). The

danger here is to become internally stuck, once consciousness becomes intoxicated with the gratification derived from this experience of equanimity and happiness, *upekkhā-sukhassāda-gathita* (MN III 226).

Overcoming this last vestige of perturbability and confinement leads to the attainment of the fourth *jhāna*, characterized in the standard descriptions as a state that has purity of mindfulness with equanimity, *upekkhā-sati-parisuddhi* (DN I 75). According to the *Visuddhimagga*, the purity of mindfulness during this deep level of absorption is precisely due to equanimity (Vism 167). In this way leaving behind *sukha, dukkha, somanassa* and *domanassa* leads to a type of equanimity that is purified and tranquil (Sn 67).

Equanimity then continues to be prominent during the four immaterial attainments. A discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* relates liberation of the mind through equanimity, *upekkhā cetovimutti*, in particular to the attainment of the sphere of nothingness, *akiñcaññāyatana* (SN V 121).

The unified equanimity of deeper *jhāna* experience is considerably more refined than worldly types of equanimity that are based on diversity, *upekkhā nānattā nānattasitā* (MN I 364). Yet, even the sublime and purified equanimity of deeper stages of concentration is merely a conditioned state and thus needs to be left behind (MN III 243).

With the unworldly equanimity of the fourth *jhāna*, *nirāmisā upekkhā*, the worldly types of equanimity in relation to the world of sensuality are long left behind, *sāmisā upekkhā* (SN IV 237). A form of equanimity that is of an even more unworldly type, *nirāmisā nirāmisatarā upekkhā*, will arise when one reviews the successful attainment of final liberation.

The role of equanimity during the progress through the *jhānas* indicates that it is the very presence of equanimity that "allows the mind to become fully sensitive and effective" (Gethin

1992: 159). This reinforces a point made above in regard to occurrences of equanimity in other contexts, which similarly go beyond mere indifference or insensitivity and present equanimity as an expression of a mature emotional attitude. Thus "Buddhist detachment means the non-reference of feeling to self, not merely the cultivation of a hedonic or emotively banal neutrality" (Katz 1979: 56).

It is in fact noticeable how again and again equanimity makes its appearance in the company of mindfulness and clear comprehension, which highlights the degree to which equanimity is related to full awareness and wisdom. In sum, then, *upekkhā* is an equanimity that "looks at" or "looks upon" with awareness and wisdom, not an indifference that looks away.

16. Knowledge and Vision according to Reality / *Yathābhūtañāṇadassana*

The Pāli expression *yathābhūtañāṇadassana* stands for "knowledge" and "vision" that is "in accordance with reality". To explore the import of such knowledge and vision according to reality, I will begin by examining the terms *yathābhūta* and *ñāṇadassana* individually (16.1-2). Then I will survey passages from the Pāli canon that are relevant to *yathābhūtañāṇadassana* as part of the Buddha's awakening (16.3), followed by turning to the development of knowledge and vision according to reality in general (16.4).

16.1 The Implications of *yathābhūta*

The qualification *yathābhūta* consists of *yathā*, "as", "like", or "according to"; and *bhūta*, which as a past participle of *bhavati* stands for what is "true" or "real", and also for what has "become" or "come to be". Kalupahana (1994: 51) explains that the use of the past participle *bhūta* expresses a non-essentialist conception of truth in early Buddhism, in the sense that what is "true" is what "has come to be".

An example where *yathābhūta* conveys the sense of "as it has come to be" can be found in the *Bhayabherava-sutta*. This discourse describes how the Buddha, when living alone in solitary forests during the time before his awakening, would confront and overcome fear there and then, in whatever way it

manifested (MN I 21). That is, without changing his posture, he would confront the issue right away, just "as it had come to be".

A similar sense of *yathābhūta* recurs in a description of the eight worldly conditions: gain and loss, fame and obscurity, blame and praise, happiness and suffering. To encounter these eight worldly conditions is simply part of living in the world "as it has come to be" (AN II 188). Hence it is meaningless to contend with these conditions, which are but natural aspects of living in the world "as it has come to be".

Elsewhere in the discourses, *yathābhūta* can qualify how a monastic disciple honestly discloses anything about himself to his fellow disciples or his teacher (DN III 237). This passage occurs within a description of a disciple who is not fraudulent or deceitful, *asaṭho amāyāvī*, hence here *yathābhūta* conveys the sense of being "according to reality" or "truthfully".

Another occurrence of similar implications can be found in the context of a simile, which describes a pair of messengers that approach the ruler of a town via a particular route in order to deliver a *yathābhūta* message (SN IV 194). In this simile, the messengers stand for tranquillity and insight, the route they take represents the noble eightfold path, and the ruler of the town corresponds to consciousness. The *yathābhūta* message that tranquillity and insight deliver to consciousness is *Nibbāna*. Elsewhere *Nibbāna* is qualified as "true", in contrast to what is deceptive (MN III 245). Applied to the simile of the pair of messengers, then, *yathābhūta* conveys a nuance of "truth", in that the message of liberation – *Nibbåna* – is certainly not deceptive.

Yet another aspect appears to underlie some passages that speak of developing the awakening factors in a way that is *yathābhūta* (DN II 83; DN III 101; SN V 161; AN V 195). These occurrences are part of statements on what all Buddhas, or

even all beings, have to undertake in order to reach awakening. Thus the sense that underlies *yathābhūta* here appears to be that the awakening factors have to be developed genuinely and to their fullest potential, "as they really are", so to speak, in order to enable the attainment of full liberation.

16.2 Knowledge and Vision

The expression "knowledge and vision" features in a range of contexts in the discourses, covering, for example, direct apperception of what happens in the mind of others (DN II 216); meditative vision of light and forms (AN IV 302); knowledge of past and future (DN III 134); various supernormal powers (DN I 76); and omniscience (e.g. MN I 92). In such contexts, "vision", *dassana*, stands for a purely mental 'seeing', in fact, in most of these instances "knowledge" and "vision" are of a supernormal type that goes beyond what can be apprehended with the physical eye alone.

The concurrence of the two terms "knowledge" and "vision" in the expression *ñāṇadassana* seems to reflect two closely related aspects of the same mental apprehension. That is, the combination of these two apperceptive activities conveys the sense that experiential 'seeing' and cognitive 'knowing' coalesce in *ñāṇadassana*. Hence *ñāṇadassana* stands for a type of insightful understanding wherein knowledge is vision and vision is knowledge, *yaṃ ñāṇaṃ taṃ dassanaṃ, yaṃ dassanaṃ taṃ ñāṇaṃ* (Vin III 91).

Another aspect of the same expression appears to be the experiential and comprehensive nature of such knowledge and vision. This becomes evident when considering the Buddha's endowment with knowledge and vision, which was such that he truly knew what he claimed to know and truly saw what he claimed to see, having realized it through direct knowledge, *abhiññā* (MN II 9). Knowing he knew and seeing he saw, whereby he had 'become' sight and knowledge, as it were,

jānaṃ jānāti passaṃ passati cakkhubhūto ñāṇabhūto (MN I 111). That is, one who claims to 'know and see' thereby claims to have direct and full experience of the matter at hand.

According to Jayatilleke (1963: 352), the expression *yathā-bhūtañāṇadassana* then points to a correspondence theory of truth in early Buddhism, where the truth or falsity of a statement depends on whether it accurately describes the world, whether it really 'corresponds' to facts.

16.3 The Buddha's Awakening

A rather axiomatic exposition of knowledge and vision according to reality can be found in the *Dhammacakkapavattana-sutta*, which describes the type of knowledge and vision according to reality that led to the Buddha's awakening. This discourse indicates that the Buddha only claimed to have reached unsurpassable awakening when his knowledge and vision according to reality in regard to the four noble truths had been completely purified in twelve modes (SN V 423).

These twelve modes result from developing each noble truth in three successive steps. The three steps require knowledge and vision of the respective noble truth, knowledge and vision of what needs to be done in regard to this truth, and the retrospective knowledge and vision that what needed to be done has been accomplished. The *Dhammacakkapavattana-sutta* describes the knowledge and vision required in each of these cases with a whole string of terms, speaking of the "arising of sight, knowledge, wisdom, higher knowledge and clarity", *cakkhum udapādi ñāṇam udapādi paññā udapādi vijjā udapādi āloko udapādi.*

In regard to the first noble truth, the three successive steps are to know and see what is *dukkha*, to know and see that *dukkha* has to be fully understood, *pariññeyyaṃ*, and to know and see that *dukkha* has been fully understood, *pariññātaṃ*. Thus

the first step is insight into the truth as such, the second step requires awareness that something needs to be done about it, and the third step represents the retrospective knowledge that this has been accomplished.

For knowledge and vision according to reality to be complete in regard to the second noble truth, insight into the arising of *dukkha* needs to lead to awareness that this arising of *dukkha* has to be abandoned, *pahātabbaṃ*, and needs to culminate in the knowledge that this arising of *dukkha* has been abandoned, *pahīnaṃ*. Similarly, knowledge and vision of the cessation of *dukkha* should lead to knowing and seeing that the cessation of *dukkha* needs to be realized, *sacchikātabbaṃ*, and that it has been realized, *sacchikataṃ*; just as knowledge and vision of the path leading to the cessation of *dukkha* should lead to knowing and seeing that this path needs to be developed, *bhāvetabbaṃ*, and that it has been developed, *bhāvitaṃ*.

This presentation shows the compass of knowledge and vision according to reality, which progresses from a decisive initial insight via a process of development to full realization. What can be clearly deduced from this passage is that such knowledge and vision according to reality is not merely an intellectual appreciation of the true nature of reality. Intellectual appreciation certainly has its place within the scope of development of knowledge and vision according to reality, forming the basis for the first step to be taken in regard to each of the four noble truths. Yet, the full development of knowledge and vision according to reality extends far beyond that.

The potential of each noble truth is only fully appreciated when it becomes clear that something needs to be done about it. Here "knowledge and vision according to reality" covers the whole range of practices that are part of the path to liberation from *dukkha*. Knowledge and vision according to reality is of relevance even beyond the culmination of the path, as the *Dhammacakkapavattana-sutta* shows, since the same term also

covers retrospective knowledge of having reached the goal. Thus the treatment of knowledge and vision according to reality in the *Dhammacakkapavattana-sutta* highlights the degree to which knowledge and vision need to be acted on, need to be put into practice in order to be fully actualised.

The *Dhammacakkapavattana-sutta* is not the only discourse that describes the knowledge and vision according to reality that led to the Buddha's awakening. According to the autobiographical account of the Buddha's awakening, given in the *Mahāsaccaka-sutta*, on the night of his breakthrough to liberation the Buddha directly knew according to reality, *yathābhūtaṃ abhaññāsiṃ*, the influxes, *āsavā*, their arising, their cessation, and the path leading to their cessation (MN I 249). The *Brahmajāla-sutta* records that the Buddha reached final liberation through having seen according to reality, *yathābhūtaṃ viditvā*, the arising and passing away of feelings, their advantage, their disadvantage, and the release from them (DN I 17). Other discourses indicate that the Buddha claimed to have reached full awakening only when he directly knew according to reality, *yathābhūtaṃ abhaññāsiṃ*, a range of different insights. These cover direct knowledge according to reality of:

- the advantage, disadvantage, and release in regard to the four elements (SN II 170 and SN II 172);
- the advantage, disadvantage, and release in regard to the five aggregates of clinging (SN III 28 and SN III 29);
- the nature, the arising, the cessation, and the path leading to the cessation of the five aggregates of clinging (SN III 59);
- the advantage, disadvantage, and release in regard to the six senses and their objects (SN IV 7 and SN IV 8; or SN IV 9 and SN IV 10; cf. also SN V 206);
- the advantage, disadvantage, and release in regard to the five faculties (SN V 204);
- and the advantage, disadvantage, and release in regard to the world, *loka* (AN I 259).

In this way, these discourses work out in detail various aspects of the comprehensive direct knowledge in accordance with reality that the Buddha attained on the night of his awakening. Had this knowledge and vision been only an intellectual appreciation, one might wonder how a single insight could cover such a range of different topics. As the treatment in the *Dhammacakkapavattana-sutta* shows, however, this was not the case, since the knowledge and vision according to reality attained by the Buddha involved a progression from initial insight, via a process of development, to retrospective knowledge of having reached full realization. Such full realization, then, can be described from a variety of angles, be these the noble truths, the elements, the aggregates, the senses, the faculties, or the world. All these would be but facets of the Buddha's comprehensive knowledge and vision according to reality, perfected on the night of his awakening. Thus the scope of the Buddha's awakening could be compared to a "circular vision, as when one is on top of a mountain ... however different the sceneries may be from the different directions, all the scenes constitute one integrated experience" if viewed from the perspective of one who stands on top of the mountain (de Silva 1987: 49).

Another aspect of the same perfection of knowledge on the night of his awakening is the Buddha's endowment with the ten powers of a Tathāgata. These also involve forms of knowledge that are in accordance with reality. According to the *Mahāsīhanāda-sutta*, the Buddha knows according to reality, *yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti*, what is possible and what is impossible; karma and its result; the way to any [rebirth] destination; the various elements that make up the world; the different inclinations of beings; the faculties of beings; and various aspects related to the attainment of concentration and realization (MN I 69).

The remaining three higher knowledges out of the entire set of ten powers also qualify as forms of *yathābhūtañāṇa* (AN III 420), so that the entire set of the ten powers of a Tathāgata can be seen as yet another pointer to the profundity of the knowledge and vision according to reality that resulted from the Buddha's awakening.

16.4 The Development of *Yathābhūtañāṇadassana*

The indication given in the *Dhammacakkapavattana-sutta* that there are different levels of knowledge and vision according to reality is echoed in other discourses, which similarly indicate that there are stages of growth in regard to knowledge that is in accordance with reality. Thus a discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* distinguishes between becoming one who has "mastered knowledge", *vedagū*, and one who has attained "total victory", *sabbajī* (SN IV 83). Here "mastery of knowledge" comes through knowing according to reality the arising and passing away, as well as the advantage, disadvantage and release in regard to the six spheres of contact. But only one who through such knowledge has become liberated can be reckoned as having attained "total victory".

One who knows according to reality, *yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti*, the arising and passing away, as well as the advantage, disadvantage and release in regard to the five faculties, can become a stream-enterer. When the same type of knowing develops further until it becomes a complete and full experience according to reality, *yathābhūtaṃ viditvā*, total liberation will be attained (SN V 194). That is, while the scope of insight and its truthfulness to reality remain the same, the deepening of such knowledge through continuous practice will lead from lower to higher stages of liberation.

In point of fact, even one who has clearly seen with right wisdom and according to reality that the cessation of becoming is *Nibbāna* need not be an *arahant*, but could have 'only'

reached a lower level of awakening. He or she would then be in a situation similar to a thirsty man who sees water down below in a well but has neither rope nor bucket enabling them to reach the water and drink it (SN II 118). This goes to show that knowledge and vision according to reality can reach various levels of maturity, corresponding to different degrees of realization.

Even in the case of the Buddha, stages in the development of his knowledge and vision according to reality can be discerned. According to the autobiographic report about the time of his own struggle for awakening, even at a time when he had clearly seen with right wisdom and according to reality that sensual objects provide little satisfaction, he had not yet gone beyond their attraction (MN I 92). This only happened when his insight into the lack of satisfaction of sensual objects was complemented by experiencing a form of happiness that is beyond the senses (to be gained through the development of deeper stages of concentration). This in turn, then, formed the basis for the knowledge and vision according to reality perfected on the occasion of his awakening, as described in the *Dhammacakkapavattana-sutta.*

The development of concentration is in fact an important requirement for knowledge and vision according to reality to grow to its full potential, together with the need to be endowed with mindfulness. The need for mindfulness is reflected in a discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya*, which treats Anuruddha's possession of some of the powers of a Tathāgata. According to this discourse, Anuruddha's abilities in this respect were the outcome of his practice of the four *satipaṭṭhāna*s (SN V 304). Since the ten powers involve forms of knowledge and vision according to reality, this discourse points to a central tool for arriving at knowledge and vision that accords with reality, namely the development of mindfulness.

This is also reflected in the instructions given in relation to contemplation of the four noble truths in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* which explicitly speak of knowing in accordance with reality, *yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti* (MN I 62). Though in relation to the remaining contemplations the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* speaks only of "knowing", *pajānāti*, without explicitly employing the qualification *yathābhūta*, the chief task of developing mindfulness is precisely becoming aware of things as they truly are. Another passage on *satipaṭṭhāna* practice explicitly uses the expression *yathābhūta* for contemplation of the body (SN V 144), thereby confirming that the aim of *satipaṭṭhāna* practice is the development of knowledge according to reality.

Besides the need for mindfulness, one needs to also dwell secluded, *paṭisallīna*, in order to be able to know things according to reality (SN III 15; SN IV 80; SN IV 145; SN V 414). Seclusion is closely related to the development of mental tranquillity, hence it comes as no surprise to find that concentration is often reckoned the requirement par excellence for knowledge and vision according to reality. One who is concentrated will naturally see and know according to reality (AN V 3). This is so much the case that concentration can be reckoned the proximate cause for knowledge and vision according to reality (SN II 31).

A concentrated mind is free from the five hindrances, and it is this absence that is of particular relevance for being able to know and see according to reality. A set of similes eloquently expresses this by comparing the effect of the hindrances on the mind to water in a bowl that is in such a condition as to make it impossible to see one's own reflection in the water. If the water is coloured, boiling, overgrown with algae, rippling, or muddy, one would be unable to know and see according to reality (SN V 121 and AN III 230). The same is the case when a hindrance is present in the mind. Therefore only a concentrated mind can know and see according to reality. The arising of a

hindrance in the mind is in turn closely related to conduct and virtue, hence those endowed with virtuous conduct will be able to see and know according to reality, *caraṇasampanno yathābhūtaṃ jānāti passati* (AN II 163).

The need for a strong base in concentration points to a difference between knowledge and vision according to reality, *yathābhūtañāṇadassana*, and the otherwise closely related *yoniso manasikāra*, "attention" that is "wise" or "thorough". Generally speaking, the two qualities of wise attention and of knowledge and vision according to reality are closely related to each other, in fact the qualification *yoniso* has much in common with the import of *yathābhūta*. Thus, for example, to direct wise attention to the aggregates of clinging or to the senses leads to contemplating their impermanence according to reality, *yoniso manasi karotha ... yathābhūtaṃ samanupassatha* (SN III 52 and SN IV 142). In such contexts, *yoniso manasikāra* stands for the deployment of wise attention during deeper stages of meditation.

Elsewhere, however, wise attention also covers forms of attention that take place at a conceptual or reflective level of the mind, and therefore are less in need of a firm basis of concentration. In fact wise attention serves as nutriment - in the sense of providing a foundation - for mindfulness and clear comprehension, *sati-sampajañña*, and for the four *satipaṭṭhāna*s (AN V 118), which in turn are the basis for developing knowledge and vision according to reality. Thus wise attention provides the foundation for developing the kind of mindful observation that, if supported by a concentrated mind, will issue in knowledge and vision according to reality.

This qualitative difference can be seen in a passage that describes how someone comes to hear the teachings, establishes wise attention and thereon engages in practice according to the teachings. This then enables him or her to know according to reality what is wholesome and what is unwholesome (DN II

215). Clearly, this passage describes progressive stages where knowledge according to reality builds on wise attention.

Thus wise attention appears to be somewhat broader in its scope, in that it also covers mental activities taking place at a comparatively less concentrated level of the mind, which would not suffice for the development of knowledge and vision according to reality. In fact, it is based on having developed wise attention that concentration arises, and a mind concentrated in this way then knows and sees in accordance with reality, *yoniso manasikaroto ... samādhiyati, samāhitena cittena yathābhūtaṃ jānāti passati* (DN III 288).

Such knowing and seeing in accordance with reality will in turn result in disenchantment and dispassion, and thereby lead to liberation. With liberation attained, knowledge and vision turn into "knowledge and vision of liberation", *vimuttiñāṇadassana* (AN V 311).

Besides its potential of leading to liberation, the development of knowledge and vision according to reality also constitutes a source of joy in itself. Thus to see with right wisdom and in accordance with reality that sense-objects are impermanent and unable to provide lasting satisfaction, *yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya passato*, will result in the joy of renunciation, *nekkhammasita somanassa* (MN III 217). One who sees in accordance with reality the impermanent and unsatisfactory nature of the five aggregates of clinging will experience such happiness that he or she can be reckoned as appeased in this respect, *tadaṅganibbuta* (SN III 43). When one knows and sees experience in accordance with reality, the very fading away of ignorance is a source of happiness and joy (DN II 215).

The scope of knowledge and vision according to reality covers the true characteristics of reality and thus often stands for knowing something from the perspective of its arising, its passing away, its advantage, its disadvantage and the release from

it. Insight into impermanence is a central aspect in the development of knowledge and vision according to reality, in fact to have clearly seen according to reality and with proper wisdom the changing nature of all conditioned phenomena is one of the powers with which those who have destroyed the influxes are endowed (DN III 283).

To purify one's vision through awareness of impermanence could take place through knowledge that accords with reality of the arising and passing away of the six sense-spheres, of the five aggregates of clinging, of the four elements, or simply of the fact that whatever arises is of a nature to cease (SN IV 192). One who thus knows according to reality the arising and passing away of all that is subject to *dukkha* will dwell free from desire and discontent (SN IV 188).

Knowing according to reality the impermanent nature of the five aggregates of clinging naturally leads to knowing their unsatisfactory and selfless nature, their conditioned nature and their nature to pass away (SN III 57). One who sees all aggregates according to reality will transcend future existence (Th 87); in fact even just seeing the nature of the body according to reality will already lead beyond all sensual desire (Thī 90; see also Thī 85). Seeing with proper wisdom and according to reality the selfless nature of the five aggregates of clinging features prominently in the *Anattalakkhaṇa-sutta*, the occasion when the first five disciples of the Buddha reached full liberation (SN III 68).

The central idea conveyed by knowledge and vision according to reality is thus seeing whatever comes within the purview of the mind as it truly is or as it has come into being. A discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* gives a remarkable presentation of knowledge, *ñāṇa*, that can be reckoned as *yathābhūta*. According to this discourse, knowledge that accords with reality requires knowing that something is there when it is there, and knowing that something is not there when it is not there, *san-*

taṃ vā ‘atthī’ti ñassati, asantaṃ vā ‘natthī’ti ñassati (AN V 36). Or else one should be able to know what is inferior or superior, and what is surpassable or unsurpassable. As the same discourse quite emphatically points out, such *yathābhūtañāṇa* is supreme among all forms of knowledge, as no other type of knowledge could be more excellent or sublime (AN V 37).

This discourse thus highlights a central feature of knowledge and vision according to reality: the type of knowledge and vision that according to early Buddhism leads to the highest spiritual perfection does not involve a deeper intuition of a mystical and ineffable essence hidden behind reality, but rather is a sober and clear apperception of reality itself, of phenomena in the world as they truly are. As the above survey of the compass of knowledge and vision shows, supernormal experiences gained through sustained meditative practice were certainly known and developed by the early disciples of the Buddha. Yet, the sober vision of everyday phenomena as they come into being and pass away – conditioned as they are and devoid of true satisfaction and without a permanent core – is far superior to any such feat. Such knowledge and vision is most excellent and sublime, since it is this type of knowledge and vision that will eventually result in the breakthrough to *Nibbāna*.

In spite of the rather simple appearance that such knowledge of phenomena according to reality may give at first sight, to be able to develop the type of knowledge that is indeed in accordance with reality is quite a demanding task, since it requires cutting through self-deception. This is required because, in a way, the scope of knowledge and vision according to reality could be said to be ‘oneself’.

Whether the mode adopted for developing knowledge and vision according to reality is based on the five aggregates of clinging, or on the six sense-spheres etc., the point of developing such knowledge is to know and see the true nature of oneself as it “has come to be” and “according to reality”. To truly

know and see oneself requires maintaining the perspective of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self throughout all aspects and moments of subjective experience, thereby withstanding the pressure of the affective investment inherent in one's self-image and in the way one's perceptions tend to construct an image of the 'world'.

In the ordinary case, witnessing one's own shortcomings easily leads to unconscious attempts at reducing the resulting feeling of discomfort by avoiding or even altering the perceived information to make it more congruent to one's view of oneself. Knowledge and vision according to reality, however, requires seeing and knowing 'according to reality', that is, remaining aloof from the influence of projections and expectations.

The relevance of knowledge that accords with reality to self-inspection is reflected in the *Anaṅgana-sutta*, which points out that one who does not know according to reality that a blemish is present within him or her will not strive to overcome it; and one who does not know according to reality that he or she is free from blemishes will not take the appropriate measures in order to protect this level of purity (MN I 25). These two cases can be compared to a dirty bronze dish that is not cleaned and to a clean bronze dish that, by not being cleaned or used, becomes dirty.

It is noteworthy that the analysis in the *Anaṅgana-sutta* gives more importance to the presence of knowledge according to reality than to the presence of a blemish as such. The reason is that even one who at present is free of blemish, but does not possess such self-knowledge, stands good chances to adopt a type of conduct that will lead to the arising of blemishes. Thus the presence of knowledge that accords with reality is the crucial factor for future progress, even more important than the degree to which one may be under the influence of defilements at a particular moment of one's practice. Such knowledge in

accordance with reality gives self-inspection the power to recognize the presence or absence of mental blemishes "as they have come to be", thereby forming the indispensable basis for adopting the appropriate type of conduct in regard to both situations. Endowed with such knowledge, sooner or later any blemish of the mind can be overcome, however strong or persistent it may appear to be.

But those who are overwhelmed by ignorance will be unable to know according to reality if a particular way of undertaking things results in future suffering (MN I 311). Those who do not know according to reality the nature of perception, failing to distinguish between the types of perception that lead downwards and those that uplift, will be unable to reach liberation (AN II 167). Hence the development of some degree of knowledge and vision that is in accordance with reality is of fundamental importance for being able to avoid unwholesome conduct and for progress on the path to awakening.

To clearly see according to reality and with proper wisdom is also the means to go beyond views (MN I 40). In fact, speculative views about the future existence of a liberated being can only arise if one does not know or see the five aggregates of clinging according to reality (SN IV 386). Seeing dependent arising, *paṭicca samuppāda*, according to reality and with proper wisdom, enables one to leave behind all speculation about the existence of a self in past and future times (SN II 26). Hence the wise, who see dependent arising, see karma as it has come to be and are knowledgeable in matters relating to its fruition (Sn 653). The world by and large is entangled in affirming or denying existence, but those who have seen according to reality and with proper wisdom the arising and passing away of the world, have gone beyond these two extremes (SN II 17). Being endowed with proper view, they stand on the threshold to the deathless (SN II 80).

"Those who have been quenched in the world,
Had insight in accordance with reality."

Ye cāpi nibbutā loke
yathābhūtaṃ vipassisuṃ (DN III 196).

17. Wise Attention / *Yoniso Manasikāra*

Yoniso manasikāra indicates a form of "attention" that is "thorough" and "penetrative", and therefore "wise". To explore the connotations of *yoniso manasikāra*, I will begin by examining the terms *yoniso* and *manasikāra* individually (17.1-2), followed by surveying passages that are of relevance to the implications of the expression *yoniso manasikāra*, and to its importance in the thought-world of the Pāli discourses (17.3-4).

17.1 Wise (*Yoniso*)

The term *yoniso* derives from *yoni*, which stands for a "womb", a "matrix", or a "place of origin". Thus *yoniso* can convey the sense of doing something "thoroughly" or in a "penetrative" manner, in the sense of going "down to its origins". The idea of doing something in a penetrative manner can be seen in a simile that describes how examining a lump of foam in a manner that is *yoniso* leads to the realization that this lump of foam is empty of any substance (SN III 140). In the context of this simile, *yoniso* conveys the idea of penetrating through the outer surface of phenomena – in this case the surface of a lump of foam – and thereby realizing the true nature of what is found beneath this surface.

The nuance of thoroughness, in the sense of doing something intensively, recurs in a description of someone who is stirred by the prospect of disease or death and thereon endeavours "thoroughly", *yoniso*, in order to progress on the path to liberation (AN II 115). Another example would be a verse, which

proclaims that the deathless can be attained even today by those who apply themselves "thoroughly" (Thī 513). A monk who in this way "thoroughly" endeavours will reach the destruction of *dukkha* (It 10). The idea of thoroughness would also be relevant for an occurrence of *yoniso* in a verse that compares "thoroughly" restraining the mind to a mahout who controls an elephant (Dhp 326).

At times, *yoniso* can also convey the sense of "proper" or "appropriate". This meaning underlies a passage where a king finds out that the Buddhist monastics make good use of robe material given to them, as once their robes become worn, they employ the cloth as mattress coverings, foot-wipers, etc., and the shreds left over after such usage are kneaded with mud and used for construction work. This convinces the king that the monks make use of the cloth they receive in a "proper" manner, *yoniso* (Vin II 292). The nuance of appropriateness could also be relevant to a passage in the *Bhūmija-sutta*, according to which it is not beneficial to live the holy life in an "improper" manner, *ayoniso* (MN III 138).

Besides the nuances of thoroughness and appropriateness, *yoniso* often conveys the idea of doing something in a "wise" manner. This sense of the term becomes particularly evident with a set of similes, where the opposite term *ayoniso* stands for doing something in an "unwise" or even "foolish" manner.

One of these similes describes a woman wondering if the child she is pregnant with will be a male and thus become the heir to the family's wealth. In order to find out, she takes a knife and cuts open her own belly. As a result, she passes away together with the embryo. Such a way of acting is to seek for an inheritance in an "unwise" manner, *ayoniso*, like fools would do (DN II 331).

The same imagery of seeking for something in an "unwise" manner, *ayoniso*, recurs in another simile which describes how

a group of villagers tries to find the sound of a trumpet by speaking to the trumpet, shaking it and hitting it (DN II 337).

A third instance of the same imagery involves making a fire. Here someone tries to kindle a fire by just chopping up the fire sticks, a rather "unwise" manner, *ayoniso*, of searching for fire (DN II 341). These three similes employ *ayoniso* in a way that clearly suggests the nuance of "wise" for the opposite term *yoniso*.

The sense of doing something in a "wise" manner as a central implication of the qualification *yoniso* finds confirmation in several occurrences of the term itself. Thus to put questions in a way that is *yoniso*, or to answer them in such a way, is the hallmark of a wise person (AN I 103). In contrast, one who is not capable of asking questions in such a manner will be reckoned a fool (DN I 118).

Another type of context involves "wisely" reflecting on the import of the teachings one has heard (Th 347). To investigate the teachings in a manner that is *yoniso* leads to purification and wisdom (SN I 34 and AN IV 3). Thus *yoniso* can qualify the type of wise mental investigation that leads to liberation (Thī 85); or stand for wisely seeing with insight the true characteristics of reality (Th 1117).

In summary, *yoniso* in its early canonical usage conveys a sense of doing something "thoroughly", in an "appropriate" manner, and "wisely". These nuances cannot be neatly separated from each other and, even though at times one of these meanings may be prominent, in some instances it would be difficult to decide in favour of just one of them. Thus the above selection of examples only intends to reflect the range of nuances conveyed by *yoniso*, without thereby implying that each occurrence has to necessarily correspond to only one of these three related meanings. An example for the convergence of these three nuances would be a verse that describes how a

monk reached liberation after having practised in a *yoniso* manner (Th 158). His practice would need to have been "thorough", must have been "proper", and certainly was "wise".

17.2 Attention (*Manasikāra*)

Translated literally, *manasi karoti* means to "do" or to "make" something "in the mind". Being one of the constituents of "name", *nāma* (MN I 53), *manasikāra* is an ever-present aspect of the mind. As such, *manasikāra* lies at the origin of all experienced phenomena (AN IV 339); since phenomena arise with the arising of attention (SN V 184).

Given that *manasikāra* is present in all states of mind, from the perspective of mental cultivation the crucial question is: To what object and in what manner is this faculty of attention directed? If, for example, *manasikāra* focuses on the feature of physical beauty, lust will invade the mind (MN I 26). Or else, if *manasikāra* dwells on the bad qualities of another person, anger will arise (AN III 187). Taking into account the need of avoiding the dire consequences of wrongly directed *manasikāra*, the Buddha would teach his disciples how attention should be directed (DN I 214). This "how" of directing attention should be *yoniso*, that is: "wise", "thorough" and "appropriate".

17.3 The Implications of Wise Attention

Yoniso manasikāra is thus a form of "attention" purposely directed in a manner that is "wise" and at the same time "thorough" and "appropriate". A central task of wise attention, in line with its nature as a form of attention that goes to the very origin of things, is to explore the conditioned nature of phenomena. A case in point can be seen in the description of the process of mental development that preceded the awakening of the former Buddha Vipassī. His understanding of dependent

arising took place through wise attention (DN II 31 or SN II 5). Wise attention performed the same role in relation to the awakening of other Buddhas, including Gotama Buddha, who similarly developed insight into dependent arising with the help of wise attention (SN II 9-10; see also SN II 104).

In all these cases, wise attention was instrumental in arousing the wisdom that led to realization. Since Buddhas awaken on their own, without being taught the way to liberation by others, the potential of wise attention in preparing the ground for the arising of liberating insight can hardly be overestimated.

Another discourse confirms that wise attention performed a central role in relation to Gotama Buddha's attainment of total liberation. According to this discourse, his awakening took place through wise attention and through striving that was similarly directed in a wise manner, *yoniso* (Vin I 22 or SN I 105).

The practical implications of wise attention in relation to dependent arising are spelled out in several discourses, which clarify that such wise and penetrative attention focuses on the specific conditionality of phenomena: "when this is, that comes to be, with the arising of this, that arises", etc. (e.g. SN II 95).

Dependent arising is, however, certainly not the only object of wise attention, a mental quality which much rather is of relevance to the entire field of insight. Especially wise attention directed to the impermanent nature of the five aggregates [affected by] clinging has a considerable potential of leading to the destruction of lust and therewith to liberation (SN III 52). It goes without saying that a similar outcome can also be attained if wise attention is directed to the impermanent nature of the senses or their objects (SN IV 142).

Besides awareness of impermanence, the range of wise attention also comprises giving attention to the five aggregates [affected by] clinging as something that is unsatisfactory, a dis-

ease, a tumour, a dart, a misery, an affliction, alien, disintegrating, empty and not-self (SN III 167). This series of qualifications builds on a foundation in awareness of impermanence and then leads on to the other two characteristics – unsatisfactoriness and not-self – described from a series of related angles. The comprehensiveness of the resultant insight perspective is such that wise attention developed in this way can lead from the level of a worldling all the way up to complete liberation.

Cultivated in this way, wise attention can become a powerful tool for de-conditioning the way perception misinterprets the world of experience. The operational mechanism of perceptual misinterpretations through unwise attention is based on the very nature of perception (*saññā*), whose task is to match information received through the sense doors with mental labels and concepts, leading to various associations and memories.

These concepts and associations are only too often tinged by desire, aversion and delusion, being the outcome of habitual reactions under the influence of defilements. Such habits have been built up throughout the past and continue to be fortified in the present, whenever such reactions recur.

Due to the influence of these habitual reactions and associations, whatever is experienced will be apprehended together with the subjective notions the mind projects onto the data of the senses. Both come together in an almost inextricable mix, and the perceiver is mostly unaware of the degree to which his or her experience is influenced by preconceived notions and thereby mirrors and confirms subjective prejudices.

Unwise and perhaps also somewhat 'superficial' attention perpetuates this state of affairs, where the falsification of data through perception remains unquestioned. The remedy here is a wise and penetrative form of attention that goes beyond the superficial appearance of things in order to come to know their

true nature, however much disappointing this may be. Continuous training in wise attention will eventually change the way perception apprehends the world, whereby awareness of the true characteristics of reality will gradually become as ingrained in perceptual appraisal as the earlier habitual reactions.

In view of this potential, it comes as no surprise that wise attention is a central condition for the arising of the awakening factors, just as its opposite unwise attention is responsible for the arising of the hindrances (SN V 94 and SN V 84). The discourses express this by reckoning wise attention the "nutriment" for the awakening factors (SN V 104). That is, attention that is thorough and wise quite literally "nourishes" the arising and establishment of those mental conditions that are directly responsible for awakening.

In particular, wise attention directed to the distinction between what is wholesome and what is unwholesome nourishes the awakening factor of investigation-of-phenomena; wise attention aimed at exertion and effort nourishes the awakening factor of energy; wise attention to tranquillity of body and mind nourishes the awakening factor of tranquillity; and wise attention directed to the characteristic of collectedness of the mind nourishes the awakening factor of concentration (SN V 104). In the case of the awakening factors of mindfulness, joy and equanimity, wise attention should be aimed at whatever can become a basis for these awakening factors in the present moment.

Besides standing in a close relationship to the development of the awakening factors, wise attention is also relevant for examining if the factors of awakening are well established in one's own mind (SN V 76), or even for the remarkable ability of knowing if the mind of another is ripe for attaining any of the four levels of awakening (DN III 107).

The imagery of providing a "nutriment" for certain mental qualities or factors also applies to the hindrances. Here wise attention has the task of attending in such a way as to deprive the hindrances of nourishment. This takes place by directing wise attention to the absence of beauty, to loving kindness, to exertion and effort, to peacefulness of the mind, and to the distinction between what is wholesome and what is unwholesome in order to "de-nourish", as it were, the hindrances of sensual desire, ill-will, sloth-and-torpor, restlessness-and-worry, and doubt (SN V 105).

In a more general way, the task of wise attention comprises overcoming all three roots of evil. By wisely and thoroughly attending to the absence of beauty, the root defilement of lust will no longer arise in the mind. Attending wisely to loving kindness will lead to overcoming the root defilement of anger; and by dint of simply developing wise attention as such delusion will be overcome (AN I 200). It is noteworthy that just wise attention itself is the chief factor responsible for avoiding delusion, which further reinforces the importance of its role as a "wise" form of attention that leads to insight.

A practical example of how one should deal with unwholesome mental qualities through wise attention can be found in a discourse that describes a monk whose mind was overwhelmed by thoughts related to sensuality, ill-will and harming. A *deva*, who had become aware of the monk's condition, admonished him (SN I 203). The *deva* told the monk that his condition was due to unwise attention and advised him that he should give up his unwholesome forms of thinking. Instead, he should direct his thoughts in a wise manner, *yoniso*. This he could do by recollecting his teacher, the teaching, the community, or his own virtue. Directing his thoughts in such a wise manner, joy will arise and lead him onwards on the path to liberation from *dukkha*.

The advice given by the *deva* points to the potential of the practice of recollection. Such practice offers a helpful tool for engendering inspiration and joy in order to overcome a situation of inner stagnation or even moments when one is overwhelmed by mental defilements.

A whole range of practical examples for wise attention can be found in the *Sabbāsava-sutta*, whose exposition presents a series of activities that lead to overcoming the influxes. According to the introductory statement in this discourse, the destruction of the influxes requires knowing and seeing, and such knowing and seeing comes about through wise attention (MN I 7). That is, wise attention serves as a heading for all the methods listed in the *Sabbāsava-sutta*, a position that reflects its relevance in relation to the task of eradicating the influxes.

Of the seven methods for overcoming the influxes listed in the *Sabbāsava-sutta*, the first requires directing wise attention to the four noble truths, which will lead to the attainment of stream-entry. Such wise attention stands in contrast to unwisely attending to meaningless questions of the type "am I at present?", etc. (MN I 8). The other six methods involve reflecting "wisely", *yoniso*, in order to:

- establish sense-restraint,
- properly use one's requisites,
- patiently endure vicissitudes of climate, etc.,
- avoid dangerous situations,
- remove unwholesome thoughts from the mind,
- develop the factors of awakening.

The range of activities assembled in the *Sabbāsava-sutta* reflects the compass of wise attention, which covers proper use of requisites just as much as developing the mental qualities that lead to attaining awakening. Whether one is wisely reflecting that food should not be taken for amusement, but only in order to maintain the body, or whether the factors of awaken-

ing are developed in such a manner that the mind inclines towards cessation and letting go – all such activities fall under the heading of wise attention, developed for the sake of removing the influxes.

The presentation given in the *Sabbāsava-sutta* shows that wise attention can take place at a reflective conceptual level of the mind as well as during deep meditation. Several discourses in fact show how a more reflective type of wise attention can serve as a transition from hearing teachings to engaging in actual practice. Yet, wise attention is also part of the practice itself, since it includes the wise form of attention that is present during deeper stages of insight contemplation.

17.4 The Importance of Wise Attention

The importance of wise attention for progress on the path to liberation can be gauged from its appearance in several listings of the factors that are required for reaching stream-entry. A rather brief listing speaks of two main factors for arousing right view: the voice of another and wise attention (MN I 294 or AN I 87).

Elsewhere in the discourses, the same theme is treated in more detail by listing four factors of stream-entry. These comprise (e.g. DN III 227):

– association with superior human beings,
– listening to the proper teachings,
– wise attention,
– practice undertaken according to these teachings.

The listing clearly follows a temporal sequence, delineating the main steps that eventually lead to the attainment of stream-entry. The obvious and most basic requirement is to come in contact with a superior human being who transmits the type of proper teachings that, on being put into practice, can lead to liberation. Another basic requirement is to be willing to listen

to such teachings. Given that much, one needs to listen to the teachings without being mentally distracted, in order to be able to develop single-minded wise attention on such an occasion (AN III 175). The final step in the series, then, requires putting the teachings into practice.

Additional details on this series of steps leading to stream-entry can be gathered from some discourses, which depict a progression from listening to the proper teachings via the establishment of "faith" or "confidence", *saddhā*, to wise attention (e.g. AN V 115). The inner faith or confidence gained from listening to the proper teachings serves as a "nutriment" for wise attention, since the inspiration developed in such way quite literally nourishes the development and maintenance of wise and thorough attention (AN V 115). To be able to rouse such inspiration requires overcoming three adverse conditions: forgetfulness, thoughtlessness and confusion (AN V 145).

Once that much has been achieved, wise attention plays its crucial role in bridging the transition from passive reception of the teachings to their active implementation. In this way, wise attention can become the basis for overcoming sensuality and other unwholesome qualities; for tranquillizing any gross type of activity by way of body, speech and mind; and for developing insight into what is wholesome and what is unwholesome (DN II 214).

The directional input provided by wise attention is comparable to the early morning dawn. Just as the dawn is the harbinger of the rising of the sun, similarly wise attention is the harbinger of the noble eightfold path (SN V 31) and of the seven factors of awakening (SN V 79). This simile points to a similarity of function between wise attention and right view. Wise attention is of such importance in this respect that some discourses declare no other mental quality to be more helpful for arousing the noble eightfold path (SN V 35), or for developing the awakening factors (SN V 101).

In short, all wholesome qualities have their root in wise attention (SN V 91), which is the decisive factor for undertaking wholesome deeds (AN V 87). Thus wise attention is the factor par excellence for arousing wholesome qualities and for overcoming unwholesome qualities (AN I 13), thereby leading to great benefit and ensuring the endurance of the teachings (AN I 18). Besides, the development of wise attention also constitutes a source of delight, joy and happiness (DN III 288).

As a form of actual practice, wise attention is of continuous relevance all the way from the first steps of practice to final liberation, a progressive development during which what initially was a form of reflection on teachings one has heard grows into a silent attention directed to the true nature of reality during deeper stages of meditation.

As a form of attention present during intense insight practice, wise attention directed to the impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-self nature of the five aggregates [affected by] clinging is a form of meditation practice undertaken by a worldling as well as by an arahant (SN III 167). That is, independent of what level of liberation someone may have reached already, wise attention developed in this way constitutes the path to the next higher stage.

For fully awakened ones the same form of wise attention is still of relevance, since it provides a pleasant abiding in the present moment and because it engenders mindfulness and clear comprehension.

The importance of wise attention as a form of attention that leads to various stages of awakening is also reflected in the *Theragāthā*, where verses repeatedly relate the attainment of liberation to the arising of wise attention on that particular occasion. In such contexts, the task of wise attention is to reveal the true nature of experience and thereby cause the arising of utter disenchantment.

Examples are the verses of Nāgasamāla, who attained liberation when directing wise attention to the vision of a dancing girl giving a performance (Th 269); Sundarasamudda, who faced temptation by a courtesan with wise attention (Th 464); Candana, who maintained wise attention when encountering his former wife (Th 301); Rājadatta, who kept to wise attention when contemplating a corpse (Th 318); Bhagu, who was full of wise attention after struggling to overcome torpor (Th 273); and Sappadāsa, who was saved from committing suicide by wise attention (Th 409).

In the majority of these cases, wise attention appears to be directed to the absence of beauty in particular, *asubha*, whereby not only the hindrance of sensual desire can be overcome, but even, as these instances show, the goal of final liberation can be won. But struggle with sensuality is clearly not the only occasion when wise attention can unfold its awakening potential. The above examples show that it can also serve its purpose when having to confront torpor or being under the influence of suicidal intentions.

In sum, then, *yoniso manasikāra* as a "wise" and at the same time "thorough" and "appropriate" type of attention has a remarkably broad scope within the context of early Buddhist mental training, ranging from attention given to the proper attitude towards food and similar requisites, or from attending single-mindedly to the oral delivery of teachings, all the way up to the penetrative type of attention that heralds the breakthrough to awakening. Given its range of applicability, wise attention thus stands out as one of the key aspects of the early Buddhist path to liberation. That is:

"Wise attention – this is one factor that conduces to distinction.
Unwise attention – this is one factor that conduces to ruin"
(DN III 273).

18. Insight / *Vipassanā*

Vipassanā and the corresponding verb *vipassati* stand for the development of a form of vision that "sees", *passati*, in an "intensified" and also "analytical" manner, *vi-*, hence *vipassanā* stands for "insight". Such insight is the key factor for liberation.

Progress towards liberation sets in fact the context for the early Buddhist conception of *vipassanā*, which stands for "liberating insight", that is, for the type of insight whose growth culminates in the total release of the mind from the grip of defilements and delusion. That is, "insight is not knowledge in the general sense, but penetrative knowledge acquired as a result of not looking *at* but looking *through* things" (Nanayakkara 1993: 580).

In what follows, I first examine occurrences of the term *vipassanā* and the related verb *vipassati* in the Pāli discourses, in order to explore the significance of the term in its early Buddhist usage (18.1). Next I turn to the practical development of insight, illustrated with the help of mindfulness meditation (18.2). Then I examine the progress of insight reflected in the scheme of insight knowledges (18.3).

18.1 The Significance of Insight

In the thought-world of early Buddhism, the chief task of insight is the development of wisdom, which in turn leads to the eradication of ignorance (AN I 61). The development of wisdom requires insight into impermanence in particular. Thus, according to the standard definition in the discourses, to be

wise is to be "endowed with wisdom regarding the arising and disappearance [of phenomena], which is noble and penetrative, leading to the complete destruction of *dukkha*" (e.g. MN I 356). This passage sets the parameters for the development of wisdom and insight. It indicates that, based on penetrative awareness of impermanence as the crucial foundation, the growth of true insight and wisdom manifests in a gradual ennobling of the practitioner and eventually culminates in total liberation from *dukkha*. That is, wisdom and insight, from an early Buddhist perspective, have a clear scope and purpose. Their scope is the true nature of reality and their purpose is liberation.

As the above description indicates, the basis for developing insight into the true nature of reality is penetrative awareness of its impermanent and therewith conditioned nature. Penetrative in so far as such insightful awareness needs to quite literally penetrate into every aspect of personal experience (Th 1091). Such comprehensive seeing with insight will ensure that the entire gamut of what is usually experienced as 'I' and 'mine' is instead seen with insight as a product of conditions and subject to change and alteration.

Comprehensive insight into impermanence then needs to lead on to insight into unsatisfactoriness and not-self or emptiness (Th 1117). That is, once a clear perception of impermanence, *aniccasaññā*, has been established, the progress of insight requires viewing what is impermanent as unsatisfactory, *anicce dukkhasaññā*, and that which is unsatisfactory needs in turn to be seen as devoid of a self, *dukkhe anattasaññā*.

The locative forms *anicce* and *dukkhe* indicate that the progression from one of these three characteristics to the next does not involve a change of object, but a change of perspective. What has been seen with insight as impermanent, is now seen as unsatisfactory, in fact it is precisely because it is impermanent that it is unsatisfactory. This dynamic is reflected in a

standard teaching on the three characteristics, found often in the discourses. In this teaching, the inquiry "is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or agreeable?" leads to the conclusion that it can only be unsatisfactory (e.g. MN I 138).

The same teaching then continues by inquiring if it is appropriate to regard what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change as "this is mine, this I am, this is my self". The inevitable conclusion is that this would indeed be inappropriate. Needless to say, passages like this are guided forms of meditation for the development of liberating insight.

In sum, once the impermanent has been seen as unsatisfactory, it is then to be viewed as devoid of anything that could justify the conceit 'I am' or any appropriation in terms of 'this is mine'. Concurrent with this progression of insight is a deepening appreciation of the conditioned nature of all aspects of subjective experience, an appreciation that from its starting point as a corollary to impermanence reaches its culmination in the direct vision of not-self with the break-through to awakening.

A discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* presents these three progressive perceptions together with "perception of eradication", *pahānasaññā*, and "perception of dispassion", *virāgasaññā* – all five perceptions having the purpose of leading to liberation (AN III 85). This presentation thus combines the scope of insight – impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self – with the purpose of insight, namely eradication and dispassion. Such dispassion, then, is the proximate cause for liberation in a dependent sequence that leads from ignorance to the destruction of the influxes (SN II 30).

True insight is diametrically opposed to the four perversions (of perception, of the mind and of views), *vipallāsa*, which 'mis'-take what is impermanent, unsatisfactory, not-self and unattractive for being the opposite (AN II 52). Undermining the force of these perversions through insight is what gradually

eradicates the defilements in the mind and thereby leads to increasing degrees of dispassion.

Instead of succumbing to the perverting force of these four perversions, insight reveals an ever more correct vision of the world that is in accordance with reality. Such a vision is a necessary requirement for progress to liberation, in fact all "those who have been quenched in this world, had insight in accordance with reality" (DN III 196).

Another quality of particular relevance for the development of insight is the investigation-of-phenomena awakening factor. The *Ānāpānasati-sutta* explains that this awakening factor stands representative for the activities of inspecting, scrutinizing and examining with wisdom (MN III 85). A crucial support for the awakening factor of investigation-of-phenomena, literally its "nutriment", *āhāra*, is wise attention. Such wise attention should be directed towards what is wholesome and unwholesome, in the sense of what is blameable, inferior and dark in contrast to what is blameless, superior and bright.

This points to another aspect of the development of insight, a development that stands within an ethical context and inevitably has ethical repercussions. Genuine insight, from an early Buddhist perspective, needs to be based on a sound moral foundation.

In turn, growth of insight will further strengthen this moral foundation, making certain unwholesome deeds a sheer impossibility for one endowed with higher insight. Such gradual ennobling through insight reaches its culmination point with the arahant. By dint of profound insight and inner purity an arahant is simply incapable of undertaking such deeds as deliberately depriving another living being of life, appropriating what belongs to others by way of theft, or consciously speaking falsehood (MN I 523). The profound insight and concomitant inner purification reached with full liberation makes it also im-

possible for an arahant to engage in sexual activity or else to hoard up things for the sake of sensual enjoyment

That is, genuine growth of insight can be measured in terms of the degree to which true inner detachment manifests in ethical purity and aloofness from sensuality.

The potential of developing insight can be seen in a discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, which reports instructions given to a monk who is under the influence of sloth-and-torpor as well as doubt and who no longer delights in living a life of celibacy (AN III 70). According to these instructions, he should combine insight into what is wholesome with sense-restraint, with contentment in regard to food and with wakefulness, and he should develop, day and night, the mental qualities related to awakening, *bodhipakkhikā dhammā*.

These instructions set up a clear behavioural context for insight, and at the same time highlight its final purpose. The discourse reports that, as a result of this teaching, the monk in question overcame his problems and developed insight all the way up to full liberation.

The need to base the growth of insight on a foundation in appropriate conduct is also highlighted in another discourse in the same collection. According to this discourse, neither the monks nor the Buddha had ever seen or heard that anyone reached final liberation without having developed insight in regard to what is wholesome in conjunction with sense-restraint, contentment with food, wakefulness, and development of the mental qualities related to awakening (AN III 301)

The potential benefits of the path of insight are available to all those who engage in its practice and gender is definitely of no relevance in this context, as the nun Somā pointed out to Māra, the Evil One. In reply to his insinuation that women are by nature incapable of higher attainments, Somā clarified that womanhood is of no relevance once the mind is well concen-

trated and the teaching is properly seen with insight (SN I 129; see also Thī 61). Though the path of insight is open for men and women alike, yet, of both there are only few that indeed see with insight, as for the most part the world remains blind (Dhp 174).

The liberating potential of insight is reflected in the *Itivuttaka*, where a series of discourses take up various defilements – such as greed, anger, delusion, conceit, etc. – in each case indicating that those who truly understand the respective defilement, by abandoning it with insight, go beyond being reborn in this world (It 1-3). The point made by this set of discourses is easily underestimated. It is only with insight into the nature of defilements, and more specifically insight into their arising in one's own mind, that they can indeed be fully abandoned.

Not only can defilements be overcome, but according to the *Ākaṅkheyya-sutta* even other types of aspirations can find fulfilment – ranging from merit for one's supporters via being dear to one's fellow practitioners all the way up to final liberation – if the development of insight is undertaken in conjunction with mental tranquillity, and in turn based on dwelling in empty places without neglecting the practice of meditation (MN I 33 and AN V 131).

The growth of insight gradually removes sensual desire. Those who by mindfully meditating with calm and discerning mind properly see the teaching with insight are no longer interested in sensuality (It 39). Once sensuality has been left behind, the growth of dispassion as a net result of deepening insight will also affect one's attitude to the meditative experience itself. Thus even a sublime experience like the sphere of nothingness, possible only after having developed profound levels of concentration, will simply be seen from the perspective that any "enchantment is a fetter, directly knowing it like this, he thus sees it with insight" (Sn 1115).

The need to beware of attachment does, however, not imply that the development of insight has to be a dreary and distressful experience. Rather, genuine insight will sooner or later be accompanied by joy and delight. As a verse in the *Dhammapada* proclaims:

"Secluded in an empty place,
a monk with calm mind
experiences delight beyond [that of ordinary] humans
on rightly seeing the teaching with insight" (Dhp 373).

Needless to say, the same applies certainly also to nuns as well as male and female lay practitioners. In fact, the term "monk" in its usage in the early discourse often functions as an appellative that covers all disciples, instead of singling out male monastics alone.

Though the development of insight will at times involve the experience of sadness and even fear, in the long run the joy of letting go and the delight of inner purity and freedom are bound to manifest. For one who experiences such letting go and inner purity, according to the *Theragāthā*,

"There is no comparable delight,
[even from] five-fold music,
as when with a concentrated mind
one rightly sees the teaching with insight" (Th 398).

An extended simile in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* describes the situation of a man who has plunged into water and might either drown or else emerge again (AN IV 11). In the context of this imagery, the one who emerges and is able to firmly remain above water and see with insight, *vipassati*, represents the stream-enterer. In fact, with this level of awakening true insight has 'emerged' to such a degree as to become firmly established.

Further deepening of insight then issues in full awakening, hence to be one who "sees with insight and knows" is one of the epithets of a Buddha (Sn 349 and Th 1269).

The same quality of being endowed with insight is also reflected in the name of the former Buddha Vipassī. According to the *Mahāpadāna-sutta*, the recently born Vipassī was given this name because he had the habit of looking without blinking his eyes (DN II 20). As a young boy in the hall of justice, he showed his ability to investigate thoroughly, thereby proving that he truly deserved his name (DN II 21). In this way, the *Mahāpadāna-sutta* indicates that unwavering attention to a matter at hand and thorough investigation are central qualities associated with the term *vipassanā*.

Another quality associated with the same term is the ability to remain in the present moment. The theme of keeping to the present moment is taken up in a set of verses on how to best spend an "auspicious night", *bhaddekaratta*. According to these verses, one should not go after the past, nor yearn for the future. Instead, spending one's time in a truly auspicious manner takes place when one sees with insight phenomena as and when they manifest in the present moment (MN III 193). Such seeing with insight here and now is also a key requirement of mindfulness practice, described in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*.

18.2 Insight and Mindfulness

A verse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* and in the *Theragāthā* contrasts one who does not see what is "outside" or does not know what is "inside" to one who knows what is "inside" and sees with insight what is "outside" (AN II 71 and Th 472). These references to outside and inside bring to mind the instructions given in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*, which similarly enjoin that mindful contemplation should cover what is "inside" and what is "outside" (MN I 56) . The *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* instructions

refer to the implementation of mindfulness with the verb *pajānāti*, he or she "knows", an expression also found in the verse above. This terminological similarity reflects a close relationship between insight and mindfulness practice. Not only such terminological similarities, but also the various modes of putting into practice the establishments of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*) point to the important support that the development of mindfulness can offer to the growth of insight.

Besides mindfulness, however, the discourses offer a variety of perspectives on the development of insight. Notably, several of the above surveyed passages speak of seeing with insight 'the teaching'. Thus a central aspect of *vipassanā* in the early canonical sources is the insightful vision triggered through a particular teaching given by the Buddha.

In fact, in the thought-world of the early discourses the term *vipassanā* stands predominantly for insight as a quality to be developed. This thus differs from the modern day usage, where *vipassanā* often stands representative for a particular form of meditation, usually a specific technique whose practice marks off one insight meditation tradition from another.

The somewhat non-technical approach for the development of the quality of insight depicted in the discourses often involves the use of maxims, sayings or brief instructions. This can be seen on recurrent occasions where a monastic disciple approaches the Buddha and requests instructions for solitary intensive practice. The teachings given in reply could be, for example: "by clinging one is bound by Māra" (SN III 73). Or else a description of the arising of delight in relation to any sense door is followed by the conclusion that "from the arising of [such] delight [comes] the arising of *dukkha*" (SN IV 37). Often enough such instructions, on being put into practice, lead to the attainment of full liberation.

This goes to show that the teachings given by the Buddha play a crucial role in the development of insight. Yet, this certainly does not mean that insight is a matter of intellectual reflection. Quite to the contrary, in fact, "there is no wisdom without meditating" (Dhp 372). But the teachings play an all-important role as a catalyst for the development of insight through meditation.

Awareness of this catalyst function makes it clear why the practice of any modern day '*vipassanā*' technique is best paired with knowledge of and timely reflection on the *Dhamma*, in order for its awakening potential to be able to unfold. To use a modern simile, the dough of meditation practice, kneaded with energy and then placed into the warmth of concentration, needs the yeast of the teachings in order to grow into the bread of insight.

Since want of space makes an exhaustive survey of canonical passages related to the development of insight impossible, in what follows I will provide practical examples for the development of insight by surveying the mindfulness practices described in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*, without thereby intending to confine insight to mindfulness practice.

According to a discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya*, contemplating arising and passing away is of such importance for the development of mindfulness that it marks the difference between mere *satipaṭṭhāna* and its "development", *satipaṭṭhāna-bhāvanā* (SN V 183). The same mode of contemplation is also highlighted in a passage that is repeated in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* after each of the individual exercises. This passage indicates that mindful contemplation, besides needing to be undertaken in a comprehensive manner by covering what is "inside" as well as what is "outside", requires observing the arising and the passing away of the contemplated phenomena (MN I 56).

Such directing of mindfulness to arising and passing away ties in well with the importance of penetrative awareness of impermanence for the development of insight and wisdom, mentioned above. The detachment and equanimity that result from such contemplation are also reflected in this passage in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*, according to which during contemplation undertaken properly one dwells independently, without clinging to anything.

Besides these key recommendations, the individual exercises listed in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* offer different approaches for the gaining of liberating insight. The four areas for the growth of insight through the deployment of mindfulness cover the body, feelings, mental states and phenomena. In regard to the body, the exercises recommended are:

– mindfulness of breathing,
– awareness of bodily postures,
– clear comprehension during bodily activities,
– reviewing the anatomical constitution of the body,
– contemplating the body as constituted of the four elements,
– recollecting the stages of decay of a corpse.

The first of these exercises, mindfulness of breathing, brings home the impermanent and dependent nature of every moment of bodily existence, as one's very survival depends entirely on the next breath. In fact, two discourses in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* recommend practising recollection of death by directing awareness to the uncertainty of being able to live even until the next breath (AN III 306 and AN IV 319).

The next two exercises direct mindfulness to bodily postures and activities. A discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* describes how a worldling's mistaken notion of a self is intrinsically related to his or her performance of the four bodily postures (SN III 151). This suggests insight into not-self to be a potential

insight that can be gained through mindfulness of one's bodily postures.

Contemplation of the anatomical constitution of the body can lead to insight into the vanity of the idea of bodily beauty, offering a strong antidote to sensual desire. According to another discourse this contemplation constitutes the method for arousing the "perception of unattractiveness", *asubhasaññā* (AN V 109), whose purpose other discourses indicate to be the overcoming of sensual desire (AN III 323; cf. also AN IV 47 and It 80). Another benefit of contemplating the unattractive nature of the body is its potential to counter conceit, a potential revealed in a passage where this exercise is recommended to monks who are being excessively honoured and venerated (MN I 336).

Contemplation of the body from the perspective of the four elements again points to insight into not-self, an insight alluded to in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* itself with the simile of a butcher who cuts up a cow into pieces for sale (MN I 58). What formerly was 'a cow' has now lost its apparent compactness and is reduced to mere 'pieces of beef'. Similarly, what formerly was 'my body' can with growing insight be seen as simply a conglomeration of the four elements. Another discourse highlights as a distinct quality of arahants that they know the elements to be entirely devoid of a self. By dint of such insight, they have gone beyond any clinging in relation to these elements (MN III 31).

A complementary aspect of the same contemplation would be insight into impermanence. This is reflected in the *Mahāhatthipadopama-sutta*. The discourse reasons that, given that due to cosmic cycles of destruction even the earth itself will eventually disappear, what to say of the impermanent nature of this body, made up of the same elements as the earth (MN I 185)?

The final exercise described under contemplation of the body reviews stages of decay of a corpse in a charnel ground, where the task of mindfulness is to keep in mind that one's own body is bound to undergo a similar fate. An insight to be gained from such contemplation is detachment in regard to the idea of bodily beauty. This potential is reflected in a passage that employs the stages of decay as a way of bringing out the inherent disadvantage of a physical body, however beautiful it may have been earlier (MN I 88).

Verses in the *Theragāthā* document the actual undertaking of contemplation of a corpse and its potential of leading to liberating insight (Th 315-319, see also Th 393-398). A discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* mentions the removal of conceit as yet another benefit to be expected from this exercise (AN III 324).

Another self-evident effect of contemplating a corpse in decay would be awareness of mortality. Death is fearful to the extent to which we identify with our body. Thus one who has insight into the impermanent nature of the body will gradually become able to dwell free from fear (Th 1093).

The next chief subject of *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation are feelings, whose crucial position as the condition for craving in the context of dependent arising makes their mindful contemplation a central ground for the arousing of insight. The task of insight here is to realize the degree to which the affective tone of feelings – be it pleasant, painful or neutral – conditions one's attitude and reactions to what is experienced.

The instructions further distinguish the three basic types of feeling into worldly and unworldly types, *sāmisa* and *nirāmisa*, thereby drawing attention to the possible activation of the underlying tendencies to passion, aversion and ignorance through worldly types of feelings that are pleasant, painful or neutral (SN IV 205).

Another prominent insight perspective engendered through contemplation of feelings is impermanence. One who has reached full liberation will experience any type of feeling as something impermanent that is felt with complete detachment (MN III 244). The constantly changing nature of feelings also reveals the characteristic of not-self, making it impossible to either posit feeling as a self or else assume that it is the self that feels (DN II 67).

Insight into impermanence and not-self continue to be central themes in the next establishment of mindfulness, concerned with states of mind. The mental states listed for mindful contemplation are presented in pairs of opposites, thereby inculcating in the practitioner the ability to clearly distinguish between what should be avoided and what should be developed.

A central purpose of contemplation of states of mind is to arouse awareness of their conditioning role on verbal and bodily activities, whose wholesome or unwholesome nature depends on the quality of the mind that has been their forerunner.

An analytical perspective on mental states becomes evident in the *Anupāda-sutta*'s description of Sāriputta's practice of insight in regard to things as they occur (MN III 25). His development of insight took place through an analysis of the mental states experienced during an absorption or immaterial attainment into their mental constituents, followed by contemplating their arising and passing away while at the same time maintaining detachment.

The same analytical perspective is turned on deeper experiences of concentration in the *Aṭṭhakanāgara-sutta*, which indicates that seeing an absorption or immaterial attainment as merely a conditioned product of the mind will yield such penetrative insight that either non-return or full awakening can be expected (MN I 350).

Contemplation of phenomena (*dhamma*s) covers the following topics:

- the five hindrances,
- the five aggregates [affected by] clinging,
- the six sense-spheres,
- the seven awakening factors,
- the four noble truths.

Two related forms of practice from this area of mindfulness meditation practice are the first and the fourth contemplation, which are concerned with the five hindrances and the seven factors of awakening. The insight to be developed here is closely related to meditation practice itself, as one should be able to clearly recognize these states, as well as the conditions responsible for their coming into being and for their removal (in the case of the hindrances) or for their further development (in the case of the awakening factors). The point behind this instruction is to foster quick recognition and the taking of appropriate measures during actual practice.

Another two related contemplations analyse personal experience from the perspective of the five aggregates and the six sense-spheres. Insight into the impermanent nature of the five aggregates [affected by] clinging features in other discourses as a particularly prominent cause for the break-through to liberation (DN II 35; DN III 223; SN II 29; SN II 253; AN II 45 and AN IV 153). The reasons for this potential are not hard to find, as insight into the impermanent nature of what is clung to as ‘I’ and ‘mine’ erodes the very foundation of clinging.

In the case of the sense-spheres, mindfulness should explore the fettering force of experiences that arise based on the senses and their objects. Mindfulness developed in this way reveals the degree to which the binding influence of the six sense-spheres is the central condition for involvement in and reaction

to the world. In fact the 'world' of experience arises just due to these six and is afflicted because of clinging to them (Sn 169).

In the case of the sense-spheres, too, impermanence is another insight to be developed, as knowing and seeing the impermanent nature of the sense-spheres will lead to the attainment of stream-entry (SN III 225), if not higher.

The culmination of the exercises listed in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*, and at the same time the culmination of the growth of insight, are the four noble truths. The supreme importance of insight into the four noble truths, which equals full insight into the dependent arising of *dukkha* and its cessation, is reflected in the circumstance that such insight features regularly in descriptions of the attainment of stream-entry during a gradual discourse given by the Buddha (e.g. MN I 380), as well as in records of the break-through to full awakening (e.g. MN I 23).

The *Dhammacakkapavattana-sutta* delineates the actual tasks required for true insight into the four noble truths, indicating that the first truth needs to be fully understood, the second to be abandoned, the third to be realized and the fourth to be developed (SN V 422; see also SN V 436).

Other discourses that take up the same four activities indicate that what needs to be fully understood are the five aggregates [affected by] clinging, what needs to be abandoned are ignorance and craving for existence, what needs to be realized are knowledge and liberation, and what needs to be developed are tranquillity and insight (MN III 289; SN V 52; AN II 247). This is indeed the gist of the practice.

18.3 The Insight Knowledges

A systematic survey of the key experience to be encountered during the progress of insight meditation is not provided in the early discourses, but is only found in later literature. Since the indications given in this later scheme of insight knowledges

are of considerable practical importance, in what follows I will depart from my general approach of focussing only on the early discourses and survey this scheme, followed by relating it to relevant passages in the discourses.

A treatment of the development of insight, given in the *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha* (Bodhi 1993: 346), lists ten such insight knowledges. Other listings count more knowledges, as they also cover stages that precede these ten insight knowledges: "knowledge of delimitating name-and-form" and "knowledge of discerning conditions" (*nāmarūpaparicchedañāṇa* and *paccayapariggahañāṇa*).

Moreover, once the experience of the ten insight knowledges leads to stream-entry, "change-of-lineage" from worldling to a noble person takes place and the "path" as well as the "fruit" of stream-entry are experienced, followed by "reviewing". Hence another four knowledges can be designated (*gotrabhūñāṇa, maggañāṇa, phalañāṇa* and *paccavekkhaṇañāṇa*), resulting in an overall account of sixteen knowledges.

The two preliminary knowledges, "knowledge of delimitating name-and-form" and "knowledge of discerning conditions", can be understood to clear the ground for the development of insight (see Vism 587-605). Their purpose is to reveal the insubstantiality of all aspects of personal existence by analysing body and mind into their component parts, and by revealing the conditioned interrelation of these component parts. Based on having discerned mind and matter as distinct but interrelated phenomena, the series of ten insight knowledges sets in. These ten knowledges comprise:

- comprehension (*sammasanañāṇa*),
- rise and fall (*udayabbayañāṇa*),
- dissolution (*bhaṅgañāṇa*),
- fearfulness (*bhayañāṇa*),
- disadvantageousness (*ādīnavañāṇa*),

- disenchantment (*nibbidāñāṇa*),
- desire for deliverance (*muñcitukamyatāñāṇa*),
- reflection (*paṭisaṅkhāñāṇa*),
- equanimity towards formations (*saṅkhārupekkhāñāṇa*),
- conformity (*anulomañāṇa*).

Knowledge of comprehension refers to contemplating the three characteristics. This then leads on to contemplating in particular the characteristic of impermanence in terms of rise and fall. At this junction of progress, experiences can arise that are "imperfections of insight" (see in detail Paṭis II 101 and Vism 633). Such imperfections (*upakkilesa*) of insight could involve the experience of, for example, deep tranquillity, or penetrative insight, or firm equanimity. Though being signs of progress, these experiences could be attached to and mistakenly grasped as attainments in themselves. Detached progress instead leads to a maturing of the penetrative experience of the continuous arising and passing away of all aspects of body and mind. This eventually culminates in an experience of total dissolution, wherein the disappearance aspect of all phenomena becomes particularly prominent.

At this stage, when the entire meditative experience is marked with constant dissolution and disintegration, fear arises. Such fear manifests because the very foundation of what is taken to be 'I' and 'mine', whether this be explicitly as a rationalized self-notion or only implicitly as a sub-conscious feeling of identity that lurks at the background of all experience, is experienced as unstable, as breaking down and disintegrating at every moment.

If mental balance can be maintained, the inherent disadvantage of all phenomena becomes evident, the whole world of experience loses all its attraction and an all pervasive sense of disenchantment sets in. Such disenchantment then expresses itself in desire for deliverance.

At this stage of practice, insight into the three characteristics of reality becomes markedly clear with knowledge of reflection, which is similar in type to the earlier knowledge of comprehension, but differing from the latter in intensity and clarity. Knowledge of reflection gains its momentum from having passed through the previous insight experiences, in particular through the experiences of dissolution, fear and disenchantment.

Eventually a profound sense of equanimity sets in, with which the not-self nature of reality becomes evident with outstanding clarity. Meditation practice continues effortlessly at this point, the mind is concentrated and well balanced. Full maturity of the development of insight comes with knowledge of conformity, which heralds the break-through to the supramundane experience.

At this point the series of ten insight knowledges has reached its completion point. The mind momentarily withdraws from externals, with which the practitioner leaves the stage of being a worldling. Immediately thereon follow the experience of the path and fruition moment, being equivalent to liberating insight into the four noble truths through realization of the third truth, realization of *Nibbāna*. On emerging from the experience of the supramundane, the mind naturally looks back on the extraordinary experience that has just happened and reviews what has taken place.

The basic dynamics that stand behind these ten knowledges could be reduced to the three characteristics, in that direct confrontation with the characteristic of impermanence (*udayabbayañāṇa* and *bhaṅgañāṇa*) leads to insight into *dukkha*, which proceeds from the onset of fear via seeing disadvantage and developing disenchantment to arousing the desire for deliverance (*bhayañāṇa*, *ādīnavāñāṇa*, *nibbidāñāṇa* and *muñcitukamyatāñāṇa*).

With the maturity of the affective transformation brought about through this deepening appreciation of *dukkha*, the characteristic of not-self becomes increasingly evident (*paṭisaṅkhāñāṇa*, *saṅkhārupekkhāñāṇa* and *anulomañāṇa*). This insight will become a matter of full and direct experience with the breakthrough to stream-entry, wherein any sense of selfhood completely disappears.

Considered from this perspective, the series of ten insight knowledges can be understood to express in a more detailed manner the basic dynamics of insight already mentioned above, which proceeds from perception of impermanence, via perception of *dukkha* in what is impermanent, to perception of not-self in what is *dukkha*.

Several of the individual stages of the insight knowledges can also be seen to take their inspiration from the early discourses. Thus a passage in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* speaks of developing "internal comprehension" through "comprehending" (SN II 107), a comprehension that stands for reflecting on the dependent arising of *dukkha* through craving. This would involve a similar insight as that envisaged by the initial insight knowledge of comprehension.

A verse in the *Dhammapada* then enjoins the meditator to "comprehend" the "rise and fall" of the aggregates in order to come to know the deathless (Dhp 374), thereby providing a lead over from the first to the second insight knowledge.

The reference in the third insight knowledge to dissolution, *bhaṅga*, can be understood to be but a different term for *khaya* or *vaya*, "destruction" and "decay", which in the discourses frequently highlight the disappearing aspect of phenomena. Both terms occur in an explanation of why all felt experience is unsatisfactory (SN IV 216), thus providing a lead over to the theme of *dukkha* which is so prominent in the insight knowledges that follow after knowledge of dissolution.

The theme of fear occurs in a discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya*, which describes how long-lived *deva*s become terrified when they realize that their existence is impermanent and unstable (SN III 85 and AN II 33). A simile in another discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* compares the four elements to poisonous snakes, the five aggregates to murderers, and the objects of the senses to a gang of robbers. These images bring out the frightful nature of these aspects of experience, once their potential to lead to attachment is seen with the clarity of insight (SN IV 174).

The qualification "disadvantageous" frequently occurs in the discourses as part of a treatment of phenomena from the three perspectives of their advantage, *assāda*, their disadvantage, *ādīnava*, and the escape from them, *nissaraṇa* (e.g. MN I 85-90). Insight into the inherent disadvantage of the five aggregates then leads to developing disenchantment, *nibbidā*, towards them (SN III 62).

The relation between seeing the inherent disadvantage of phenomena and having the desire for liberation comes to the fore in the Buddha's autobiographical account of his own striving for awakening. According to this account, on seeing the disadvantage in what is subject to decay he set out in search for *Nibbāna* (MN I 167). Hence these passages would correspond to the pattern of the insight knowledges that leads from awareness of disadvantageousness to disenchantment and desire for deliverance.

The *Sabbāsava-sutta* relates the idea of reflection to developing the seven factors of awakening in such a way that they are based on seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, culminating in letting go (MN I 11). In the discourses, this mode of development of the factors of awakening usually designates a stage of practice that issues in realization and would thus be reflecting a similar level of development as knowledge of reflection.

Though the term *saṅkhārupekkhā* itself does not appear in the discourses, the same idea could be seen in the depiction of the progress towards the seventh awakening factor given in the *Ānāpānasati-sutta*. According to this discourse, by looking on with equanimity at the concentrated mind the awakening factor of equanimity arises (MN III 86).

The *Visuddhimagga* illustrates *saṅkhārupekkhāñāṇa* with the help of a simile found in the *Devadaha-sutta* (Vism 656). This simile describes a man who formerly suffered on seeing the woman he loves conversing and laughing with another man. Once he has overcome his affection for the woman, however, he is no longer affected by her behaviour. In the *Devadaha-sutta*, this simile indeed illustrates the development of equanimity (MN II 223).

The idea of conformity makes its appearance in a context related to the attainment of realization as "conformity of patience". In this context, conformity stands for the result of having developed insight into the three characteristics, leading to the attainment of the four stages of awakening (AN III 441).

Hence even though the systematisation of the progress of insight in terms of ten insight knowledges is clearly a later development, its basic dynamics as well as individual components of this scheme have their source in the early discourses.

The circumstance that the early discourses do not provide such a precise scheme is perhaps not without significance, as there is a danger of such descriptions becoming prescriptions, in the sense of the theoretical model creating expectations in a meditator and thereby interfering with the natural unfolding of meditative insight.

Genuine experience of the insight knowledges is bound to evolve in an individual manner and will never precisely match the theoretical model. Hence the important indications on the basic pattern underlying the progress of insight provided in the

scheme of the insight knowledge are best made use of in a manner that itself reflects growing insight: without clinging to anything.

> "One who meditates continuously,
> endowed with subtle view and insight,
> delighting in the destruction of clinging,
> him they call 'a true person'"
> (SN II 232; It 74 and Th 1012).

19. Tranquillity & Insight / *Samatha & Vipassanā*

Tranquillity (*samatha*) and insight (*vipassanā*) are two complementary aspects of early Buddhist meditation practice. As already mentioned at the outset of the previous chapter, *vipassanā* stands for a form of vision that "sees", *passati*, in an "intensified" and also "analytical" manner, and thus represents the development of "insight".

In an occurrence outside of a meditative context, the term *samatha* stands for the "settling" of legal questions, *adhikaraṇa samatha* (Vin IV 207). In the context of meditation, to develop *samatha* similarly requires 'settling' the mind, in the sense of making it 'steady', 'quiet', 'unified' and 'concentrated' (AN II 94). In what follows, I examine the cooperation between tranquillity and insight (19.1) followed by turning to the sequence of practicing tranquillity and insight (19.2).

19.1 Cooperation between Tranquillity and Insight

While the practice of insight has the purpose of leading to the destruction of ignorance, the practice of tranquillity is specifically aimed at the destruction of passion (AN I 61). This, however, would not imply that these two aspects of meditation represent two different paths leading to two different goals. Another passage explains that for the sake of eradicating passion and a whole host of mental defilements both tranquillity and insight are required (AN I 100). Thus the above distinction only intends to draw attention to the specific task or quality of

these two interdependent aspects of early Buddhist meditation practice.

The basic difference between tranquillity and insight can be illustrated with the help of mindfulness of breathing, since this meditation practice can be developed in both modes. The difference here depends on what angle is taken when observing the breath, since emphasis on various phenomena related to the process of breathing stays in the realm of variegated sensory experience and thus is more geared towards the development of insight, while emphasis on just mentally knowing the presence of the breath leads to a unitary type of experience and is thus capable of producing deeper levels of tranquillity.

The development of tranquillity leads to a high degree of mastery over the mind and thereby forms a basis for the development of insight. Insight that is developed by a calm and steady mind will be able to penetrate into the deeper regions of the mind and thereby bring about true inner change.

In addition to its supportive function in relation to insight, the development of tranquillity also has benefits on its own. The experience of deeper stages of tranquillity is one of intense pleasure and happiness, brought about by purely mental means, which thereby automatically eclipses any pleasure arising in dependence on material objects. In this way, the development of tranquillity can become a powerful antidote for sensual desires, by divesting them of their former attraction (e.g. MN I 91; MN I 504; AN III 207 and AN IV 411).

The path leading to the unconditioned requires both tranquillity and insight (SN IV 359). Both are to be developed by higher knowledge as integral parts of the noble eightfold path (MN III 289; SN V 52 and AN II 247). In fact, in the discourses the terms tranquillity and insight usually occur together. This is so much the case that the two are at times simply coupled with each other as essential aspects of the Buddha's teach-

ing (DN III 213 and AN I 95), conveying the impression that they are just the two sides of one coin.

The close relationship between tranquillity and insight is also evident in a survey of various aspects of the early Buddhist path of practice as the way to the unconditioned. This survey mentions tranquillity and insight as one category and alternatively lists such categories as the four right efforts, the seven factors of awakening, or the noble eightfold path (SN IV 360). What emerges from such listings is that, from the perspective of the early discourses, tranquillity and insight are two qualities that necessarily operate in conjunction.

The same principle finds a fitting illustration in a simile, according to which tranquillity and insight are a "pair of messengers" whose task it to carry the message of *Nibbāna* along the road of the noble eightfold path (SN IV 195). Both tranquillity and insight are required for progress from right view to full liberation (MN I 294 and AN III 21); hence for further progress both are recommended to a disciple in higher training (MN I 494). A whole range of defilements can be overcome by developing both (AN I 100); hence tranquillity and insight are of such importance that one should make a determined effort in regard to both (MN III 297).

The need to develop both tranquillity and insight is taken up in more detail in a discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, which describes four types of practitioners, distinguished according to whether they have been able to gain:

– internal tranquillity of the mind,
– higher wisdom through insight into phenomena,
– neither of the two,
– both.

According to this discourse, in case only one of the two or even none of them has been developed, one should search for counsel and instructions on how to develop the lacking quality.

In its description of the inquiry that someone who lacks one or both puts to an experienced practitioner for guidance, this discourse indicates that "internal tranquillity of the mind" stands for being able to concentrate the mind. "Higher wisdom through insight into phenomena" requires knowing how formations (*saṅkhāra*s) should be regarded, comprehended and seen with insight (AN II 94).

Besides providing a definition of tranquillity and insight, this discourse again underlines that both need to be developed for progress towards the destruction of the influxes. The predicament of one who lacks both is comparable to someone whose head is on fire (AN V 99), that is, something needs to be done immediately. Lacking only higher wisdom through insight into phenomena is still as detrimental as the predicament of a four-footed animal that has one of its legs crippled (AN IV 360).

A calm mind supports the development of insight and the presence of insight in turn facilitates the development of deeper levels of calmness (Dhp 372). Therefore tranquillity and insight are at their best when developed in skilful co-operation. Viewed from this perspective, to speak of tranquillity and insight is less a matter of distinguishing between two separate systems of meditation than of highlighting two central qualities that are to be developed in conjunction with any type of meditation practice.

19.2 Sequence of Practising Tranquillity and Insight

Though there is a time for the practice of tranquillity and there is a time for developing insight, only by developing both at the proper time, together with hearing the teachings and discussing them, will gradually lead to the destruction of the influxes (AN II 140). Once both have been developed, progress becomes natural, comparable to rainwater that fills the rivulets and rivers and gradually reaches the ocean.

According to the *Yuganaddha-sutta* (AN II 157), progress to awakening can take place in the following manner:

– insight preceded by tranquillity,
– tranquillity preceded by insight,
– tranquillity and insight conjoined,
– (overcoming) restlessness in regard to the teachings.

Each of these four modes leads to the experience of the path. Further development and practice of this path then brings about the removal of the fetters and underlying tendencies. According to the introduction to the discourse, all those, who declared their successful attainment of final liberation in the presence of Ānanda, did so after having followed one or the other of these four approaches.

The first two of these four approaches are self-evident, in that either tranquillity or else insight is developed first, followed by the other. Notably, both modes are presented side by side without any indication that one of them is to be preferred over the other.

The notion of tranquillity and insight practiced in conjunction recurs in the *Mahāsaḷāyatana-sutta*. This discourse describes the development of insight in regard to sense experience, which then leads to developing the eightfold noble path and other qualities conducive to awakening. Practising in this way, according to the *Mahāsaḷāyatana-sutta* tranquillity and insight proceed in conjunction (MN III 289).

Examples for the fourth mode of arriving at stream-entry, described in the *Yuganaddha-sutta*, could be those occasions when someone attains stream-entry during a discourse given by the Buddha. In several such instances, as for example in the case of the stream-entry of the leper and beggar Suppabuddha (Ud 49) or even of hired killers that had the mission to murder the Buddha (Vin II 192), it can safely be assumed that the per-

sons in question had not previously engaged in the systematic meditative development of tranquillity or insight.

The standard descriptions of stream-entry during a gradual discourse given by the Buddha regularly indicate that the mind of the listener is free from the hindrances (e.g. MN I 380). Such instances may well fit the fourth case envisaged in the *Yuganaddha-sutta*, in the sense that the Buddha's skill at exposition was such that he could bring about what otherwise can only be achieved through the systematic development of tranquillity and insight: a balanced state of mind that is able to break through to stream-entry due to having overcome the hindrances (and in particular any restlessness related to the *Dhamma*) while hearing a penetrative exposition given by the Buddha.

Whatever may be the final word on the implications of the final two approaches described in the *Yuganaddha-sutta*, there can be no doubt that the point made in this discourse is that tranquillity and insight can be combined in various ways and there seems to be no need to assume that one must invariably precede the other.

At the same time, however, it is quite evident that this discourse does not envisage an approach to awakening that relies on only one of these two, practiced at the cost of excluding the other. Moreover, once stream-entry has been attained, both are needed for further progress (MN I 294).

This provides an important perspective on the practice of tranquillity and its relation to the development of insight. The *Yuganaddha-sutta* indicates that tranquillity neither leads on its own to awakening, nor is it an absolute requisite that needs to be developed up to a certain degree before undertaking the development of insight, nor can its development be completely neglected for the sake of insight.

That is, the development of tranquillity is a necessary companion to the development of insight, but the way in which this companion is related to the practice of insight is up to individual choice.

Monoculture, however, should definitely be avoided, in order to ensure that tranquillity and insight perform their purpose of leading to liberation.

20. Concentration / *Samādhi*

Samādhi represents a mental quality or a state of mind that is quite literally "put together" or "collected" (*saṃ* + *ā* + *dhā*). My examination of this important ability to collect the mind begins with an initial survey of various types of *samādhi*, followed by covering the following themes: aspects of the gradual path of training in their relation to gaining concentration, the development and nature of absorption, supernormal abilities to be acquired through proficiency in *samādhi*, and the relationship between concentration and awakening.

In the Pāli discourses, the term *samādhi* occurs in a variety of contexts, covering not only the realm of tranquillity proper, but also the development of insight. Thus *samādhi* can refer to the practice of walking meditation (AN III 30), or to contemplating the arising and passing away of the five aggregates (AN II 45). A passage from the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* treats even the four establishments of mindfulness as a form of *samādhi* (AN IV 300).

The breadth of meaning of the term *samādhi* becomes also evident in the fact that the discourses distinguish between various types of concentration. Thus the *Saṅgīti-sutta* (DN III 222) differentiates between *samādhi* that leads to a pleasant abiding by attaining absorption; *samādhi* that leads to knowledge and vision by developing the perception of light or clarity (*ālokasaññā*); *samādhi* that leads to mindfulness and clear comprehension by contemplating the arising and passing away of feelings, perceptions, and thoughts; and *samādhi* that leads to

the destruction of the influxes by contemplating the arising and passing away of the five aggregates.

The same *Saṅgīti-sutta* (DN III 219) presents another set of three *samādhi*s by distinguishing between concentration that is empty, signless, or undirected. Out of these three types of *samādhi*, the signless concentration occurs frequently in the discourses on its own. To develop such signless concentration is to direct attention away from any possible 'sign' (MN I 298). In the present context, 'sign' stands for those aspects or marks of phenomena with the help of which one is able to recognize an object.

The *Saṅgīti-sutta* (DN III 219) has still another threefold distinction of *samādhi* to offer, which lists concentration with initial and sustained application of the mind, without initial but still with sustained application of the mind, and finally without both (see also DN III 274; MN III 162; SN IV 360; SN IV 363 and AN IV 300). The first of these represents levels of concentration up to and including the first absorption and the last the other three absorptions, while concentration without initial but still with sustained application of the mind occupies a position between the first and the second absorption (see in more detail below).

The *Dasuttara-sutta* presents another set of four types of concentration by distinguishing between concentration that is conducive to decline, to stability, to distinction and to penetration (DN III 277). Another set of four *samādhi*s forms part of the standard presentations of the four roads to supernormal power (*iddhipāda*) in the discourses (SN V 268). These four roads to supernormal power differ due to the mode of concentration employed in each case. Such concentration can be based upon wholesome forms of desire, upon energy, upon inclining the mind, and upon investigation.

The notion of "power" underlying these four roads to supernormal power points to one of the manifold benefits of deeper levels of *samādhi*, namely the possibility to develop supernormal powers. Before, however, turning to such possible fruits of *samādhi*, first the factors required for its development need to be surveyed. These factors can conveniently be covered by examining central aspects of the gradual path of training, whose dynamics are closely related to the development of samādhi.

In the present chapter, I will first examine the development of concentration (20.1). Then I will turn to absorption concentration (20.2) and supernormal abilities (20.3). I will conclude with the role of concentration in relation to awakening (20.4).

20.1 The Development of Concentration

The foundation for any mental culture is morality, and its relevance for *samādhi* finds expression in a standard qualification of moral conduct as being "conducive to concentration" (e.g. MN I 322). The development of morality covers also the area of speech, where friendly forms of communication are expressly related to concentration, since harsh speech is "not conducive to concentration" (MN I 286). Not only harsh speech, but also quarrelsome speech will obstruct the gain of concentration (AN IV 87).

An important aspect of the gradual path of training is restraint of the sense-doors, a practice especially aimed at overcoming sensory distraction. This constitutes an important condition for the development of concentration. Only once the compulsion of infatuation with the senses has become weakened will the mind be able to settle within and gain concentration.

Another step in the gradual path of training is contentment, particularly significant in the present context since one who is not content with external circumstances will not be able to gain concentration (Dhp 249). Contentment is in fact a key factor

for the development of mental tranquillity, with a potential for leading to a deepening of concentration that can hardly be overestimated.

Consistent precedence given to the development of contentment during all activities as well as when settling down for formal meditation goes a long way in preparing the ground for what is, in a way, the direct result of contentment: a mind that is happily settled within and therefore able to gain deep concentration.

A related feature is moderation in regard to food, given that overeating will cause drowsiness and thereby obstruct concentration (SN V 64). During intensified practice in seclusion or under retreat conditions, food can easily become the last available arena for sensual distraction. Yet, giving in to the type of sensual pleasure available through food is diametrically opposed to the form of happiness that can be gained within, once concentration deepens.

When these basics have been put into practice successfully, the gradual path of training moves into those areas of the noble eightfold path that belong to the category of the aggregate of concentration proper. This aggregate of concentration comprises, besides right concentration itself, right effort and right mindfulness.

The *Cūḷavedalla-sutta* (MN I 301) clarifies that concentration requires the development of the four right efforts, which are its “requisites”. The same holds for right mindfulness in form of the four establishments of mindfulness, which are the “signs” (*nimitta*) of concentration. The close relationship between mindfulness and concentration can also be inferred from a statement by Anuruddha (SN V 298), in which he attributes his outstanding concentrative abilities to his practice of the establishments of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*).

In the context of the gradual path of training, right effort finds its expression in the practice of wakefulness. According to the standard descriptions, wakefulness stands for purifying the mind from obstructive states, indeed a necessary condition for being able to gain *samādhi*.

Concomitant with such overcoming of obstructive states is the cultivation of mindfulness, exemplified in the gradual path scheme through the development of clear comprehension in regard to any bodily activity. Out of the various bodily activities to be conducted with mindfulness, the walking posture is particularly capable of leading to a stable form of concentration (AN III 30)

Once the mind is endowed with wakefulness and mindfulness, the five hindrances can be overcome. The mental collectedness and composure of concentration one may experience reflects the degree to which these hindrances have been overcome, as their presence tends to scatter and agitate the mind. When they are left behind, delight and joy arise, followed by tranquillity and happiness, four factors whose arising naturally leads to a deepening of concentration (cf. e.g. DN I 73).

For the purpose of overcoming the five hindrances and developing deeper levels of concentration, the discourses often recommend withdrawal into seclusion. The standard descriptions of the type of environment conducive to the development of concentration recommend places such as the root of a tree or an empty place.

The relationship between seclusion and concentration is reciprocal, since not only does seclusion facilitate concentration, but one who is bereft of concentration will also not be able to benefit from living in seclusion (AN V 202), or even find delight in a secluded life-style.

Physical seclusion thus has its complement in mental seclusion through removal of the hindrances. Here the *Upakkilesa-*

sutta (MN III 158) offers a helpful survey of mental obstructions that could prevent the deepening of concentration. The obstructions (*upakkilesa*) mentioned in this discourse are a set not encountered elsewhere in the discourses, being specifically related to the development of deeper concentration. The mental obstructions listed are doubt, inattention, sloth-and-torpor, consternation, elation, unease, excessive energy, deficient energy, longing, diversified perceptions and excessive meditation on forms.

A closer examination of this list reveals that this set of mental obstructions incorporates various manifestations of the last three hindrances. This indicates that, even before attempting to develop concentration, the first two hindrances of sensual desire and ill-will have to be removed. Overcoming the remaining three hindrances is what then leads to a gradual deepening of concentration, until the first absorption can be experienced.

Another noteworthy aspect of the *Upakkilesa-sutta* is its reference to the "sign", *nimitta.* According to the *Upakkilesa-sutta*, Anuruddha and his companions told the Buddha that they saw meditative lights and forms, but these soon disappeared. In reply, the Buddha explained that they should "penetrate that sign" (MN III 157). The use of the expression "sign" in the present context is to some extent ambiguous, as it could have a plain causal sense, simply indicating that they should understand the cause for the disappearance of their meditative visions.

Alternatively, *nimitta* can also stand for a "sign" in the sense of the characteristics with the help of which perception recognizes an object. To understand *nimitta* in the sense of a meditative sign would also fit the present context, which treats meditative visions and the development of concentration. In fact, at a later point the *Upakkilesa-sutta* speaks of directing attention to the meditative experience of forms or to that of light in terms of the *rūpanimitta* and the *obhāsanimitta* (MN III 161).

This passage explicitly uses the term *nimitta* to refer to the vision of light and forms that Anuruddha and his companions had been unable to stabilize, a usage where *nimitta* unequivocally stands for something that is perceived.

From this it seems that the *Upakkilesa-sutta* could indeed be describing the development of the mental *nimitta* required in order to enter the first absorption. This interpretation would also fit with the mental imperfections listed in the *Upakkilesa-sutta*, which, as already mentioned above, do not cover the first two of the five hindrances, sensual desire and aversion. Their absence implicitly shows that the meditative development treated in the present discourse sets in at a more advanced stage, when these two comparatively gross mental defilements have already been successfully subdued and a minimal basis of mental tranquillity has been established. It is precisely at this stage, when the gross hindrances of sensual desire and aversion have been overcome and the mind becomes increasingly concentrated, that the *nimitta* in the sense of a mental sign can manifest to the meditator.

The use of the term *nimitta* in a context related to the development of concentration is not unique to the *Upakkilesa-sutta*. Elsewhere the discourses also refer to the "sign of tranquillity", *samathanimitta* (DN III 213; SN V 66; SN V 105), to the "sign of concentration", *samādhinimitta* (DN III 226; DN III 242; DN III 279; MN I 249; MN I 301; MN III 112; AN I 115; AN I 256; AN II 17; AN III 23; AN III 321), and to the "sign of the mind", *cittanimitta* (SN V 151; AN III 423; Th 85). The unique contribution made by the *Upakkilesa-sutta* is that it offers a report of actual practice that involves the *nimitta* in a context geared towards absorption attainment.

20.2 Absorption

The attainment of absorption appears to be in fact the central theme of the *Upakkilesa-sutta*, which indicates that overcoming the above mentioned mental imperfections leads to concentration with initial and sustained application of the mind, then to concentration without the former but with a remainder of the latter, and then to concentration without both.

It is perhaps worthy of note that this alternative mode of reckoning the absorptions, already mentioned above as a threefold reckoning of concentration found in the *Saṅgīti-sutta* and several other discourses, does not imply a substantial difference in regard to actual experience. It only offers a different perspective on the same experience of gradually progressing through deeper stages of concentration.

The mode of presenting such progress in terms of the four absorptions, which in the early discourses is the prevalent way in which the absorptions are treated, emphasizes the affective tone of the different levels of concentration experienced during such development. This more affectively oriented mode of description highlights the experience of:

– rapture and happiness of seclusion (1st absorption),
– rapture and happiness of concentration (2nd absorption),
– happiness devoid of rapture (3rd absorption),
– equanimity (4th absorption).

The threefold presentation instead places emphasis on the role of the mental factors of initial and sustained mental application. This threefold mode presents the deepening of concentration from the perspective of the three stages when both are present, when during an interim stage initial mental application is already absent but sustained mental application is still present, and when finally both are absent:

– initial and sustained mental application (1st absorption)
– sustained mental application
– no mental application (2nd to 4th absorption)

That is, the threefold mode of exposition treats the initial stages of progressively deepening of absorption in more detail, as it accords importance to a stage when initial mental application has already been subdued, but sustained mental application is still present. The more affectively oriented mode of presentation underlying the four absorption scheme does not take this interim stage into account, because it still falls under the category "rapture and happiness of seclusion".

Conversely, the fourfold mode takes up the more advanced stages of progress through different levels of absorption in greater detail, according importance to the affective changes that occur when concentration that is without initial and sustained mental application progressively deepens.

Another significant indication related to the nature of absorption can also be gathered from the *Upakkilesa-sutta.* According to its account, before his awakening the Buddha had to make quite an effort in order to overcome a whole series of obstructions until he was able to attain the first absorption (MN III 157). This suggests the first absorption to be a state of mind reached only after prolonged practice and requiring considerable meditative expertise.

This impression is confirmed by turning to the cases of Anuruddha and Mahāmoggallāna. In the case of each of these two chief disciples the personal intervention of the Buddha was required for them to be able to attain and stabilize the first absorption (MN III 157 and SN IV 263). If Anuruddha and Mahāmoggallāna, who later on were reckoned as outstanding among the Buddha's disciples for their concentrative abilities (AN I 23), had such difficulties, then it can safely be conclud-

ed that the first absorption stands for a level of concentration that requires considerable meditative training.

Elsewhere the discourses in fact indicate that during the first absorption it is impossible to speak (SN IV 217), and the hearing of sounds is an obstruction to its attainment (AN V 135). With the first absorption one has gone beyond Māra's vision (MN I 159), having reached the end of the world of the senses (AN IV 430). These passages confirm that the first absorption is indeed a state during which the mind is "absorbed" in deep concentration.

Once the first absorption has been attained, a meditator should develop skill in attaining, in maintaining and in emerging from the attainment (AN IV 34). This much accomplished, the second absorption comes into view, a mental experience qualified in the standard descriptions as being "born" of *samādhi*. This qualification points to the fact that with the attainment of the second absorption the meditator has moved beyond the subtle mental ripple caused by the presence of initial and sustained application of the mind, two factors of the first absorption that need to be left behind in order to gain the second absorption.

Further deepening of concentration leads via overcoming of joy to the third absorption and by gaining perfect equanimity to the fourth absorption, with the attainment of which the acme of the development of concentration has been reached. With the imperturbable (*aneñja*) level of concentration reached in this way, the possibility of gaining the immaterial attainments comes into view, refined mental experiences that employ the concentrative strength gained with the fourth concentration to develop increasingly subtler types of perceptions.

The first of these goes beyond the experience of materiality by developing the perception of boundless space. Turning awareness towards the mind that experiences this boundless

space leads to the perception of boundless consciousness. Attending to all-pervading consciousness as something that is literally 'nothing' then paves the way to the third immaterial attainment, while leaving behind even the perception of 'nothingness' culminates in a further deepening of experience, whose subtle nature is such that it neither qualifies for being a form of perception, nor for being devoid of perception.

20.3 Supernormal Abilities

With the experience of the deep levels of concentration gained through the four absorptions not only the common world of experience is left behind, but also potential powers and abilities of the mind can be accessed that go beyond the confines of common experience. The discourses frequently mention a set of six such supernormal knowledges (*abhiññā*), which include various magical powers of transformation, supernormal audition and vision, telepathy and recollection of one's past experiences previous to the present life. The last and supreme of these supernormal knowledges is the destruction of the influxes, and it is in order to develop this particular knowledge that concentration has such a central place in the early Buddhist path scheme.

Besides its chief purpose of leading to awakening, however, the successful development of concentration also forms the basis for attaining other abilities that are "beyond [the power of ordinary] men", *uttarimanussa*. A detailed listing of such states can be found in the *Vinaya* in the context of the fourth rule involving defeat (Vin III 91). According to this rule, a monk who falsely lays claim to any such state beyond the power of ordinary men irrevocably loses his status as a *bhikkhu*.

The fact that falsely claiming supernormal abilities is thus treated on a par with engaging in sex, theft and murder highlights the seriousness of such behaviour. According to the

background narration to this regulation, at a time of famine some monks had resorted to such false claims in order to ensure that they would get sufficient alms.

The theme of claims to supernormal abilities comes up again in another *Vinaya* regulation of less grave consequences (Vin IV 25). The background narration to this rule is the same, the only difference being that here the monks who made claims in order to ensure food supplies had indeed attained what they were claiming. Nevertheless, their behaviour was considered blameworthy and censurable.

These *Vinaya* regulations highlight two aspects of supernormal abilities, namely the high esteem that was accorded in ancient India to anyone who could claim or even display some kind of supernormal ability, and the early Buddhist disdain towards making such claims and displays for worldly purposes.

A quite explicit instance of such disdain can be found in the *Kevaddha-sutta*, according to which the householder Kevaddha wanted Buddhist monks to display supernormal abilities and perform extraordinary feats of psychic power in order to convert the inhabitants of Nāḷandā (DN I 211). In reply to this suggestion, according to the *Kevaddha-sutta* the Buddha explained that he would not let his monks make any public display of supernormal abilities, followed by differentiating between three types of extraordinary feats:

– supernormal powers such as multiplying oneself etc.,
– the telepathic ability to read the mind of others,
– instructions on how to train one's own mind.

Of these three, the third is reckoned superior, since instructions on how to develop and liberate the mind will enable others to come to realization by themselves. In this way the *Kevaddha-sutta* indicates that, instead of trying to amaze the multitude with exhibitions of supernormal powers, the way the Buddha wanted his teachings to impress themselves on the

public was through the power of instructions that lead to self-realization.

In contrast to such self-realization, according to the *Kevaddha-sutta* the Buddha disapproved, rejected and disdained the other two types of extraordinary feats (DN I 213). Since according to the same *Kevaddha-sutta* the Buddha was himself endowed with all three of these extraordinary feats, the message conveyed by this passage would not be a wholesale rejection of supernormal powers and telepathy as such, but rather of their public display as a means to arouse faith.

The rationale behind this disapproval appears to be that faith based on any external display will always remain a type of faith that can be shaken by others. The third of the three extraordinary feats, discussed in the *Kevaddha-sutta*, leads to a different type of faith or confidence, as it is not based on an external display of the abilities of others, but on having realized within oneself the truth and efficacy of the instructions given by the Buddha. The point made in the *Kevaddha-sutta* is thus not a rejection of supernormal abilities as such, but only of their public display for ulterior motives.

This much could also be gleaned from the above-mentioned *Vinaya* rules. In fact, according to a discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* not only the Buddha himself, but a considerable number of his disciples were similarly endowed with all three of these extraordinary feats (AN I 172). Other discourses proclaim that a monk endowed with ability in these three extraordinary feats deserved to be reckoned as supreme among gods and men (AN I 292 and AN V 327). These passages further support the impression that what is rejected are not such supernormal abilities in themselves, but only their public display for the sake of worldly benefits.

A distinction in regard to the motivation behind performing a supernormal feat can also be seen when comparing two other

supernormal performances recorded in the *Vinaya*. In the first of these two cases, the monk Pilindavaccha had changed a piece of grass into a golden garland in order to assuage the grief of a little girl in the house of his supporters, who due to poverty was not able to adorn herself like the other girls in the village (Vin I 208). When the king found out that the poor family was in possession of a golden garland he had the whole family arrested, suspecting them to be thieves. Pilindavaccha thereon visited the king and changed the whole palace into gold in order to prove that the poor family could come to possess a golden garland without thievery. As a result of this display of supernormal abilities, the family was released.

The *Vinaya* does not record any reproach by the Buddha of these two instances of exhibition of supernormal abilities, but rather tackles the problem of how his fellow monks should handle the abundant supplies that as a result of Pilindavaccha's displays had accrued to them.

The second case in the *Vinaya*, however, involves a supernormal feat displayed for the sake of self-exhibition. Here the monk Piṇḍolabhāradvāja had exhibited his magical powers through an act of levitation in order to obtain a costly sandalwood bowl that was hanging at the top of a high pole (Vin II 111). The bowl had been set as a prize by a merchant for any recluse or Brahmin able to reach it through the exercise of supernormal ability. Piṇḍolabhāradvāja's act incurred the Buddha's censure, who compared it to a woman who exhibits her private parts for payment.

The difference in treatment between the magical feats performed by Pilindavaccha and Piṇḍolabhāradvāja further corroborates the impression that criticism of such feats is levied at public exhibition for the sake of worldly benefits, not at magical abilities per se.

In fact, the performance of wondrous and supernormal feats is a recurrent feature in the early discourses and other *Vinaya* passages. These depict how the Buddha performed a magical feat in order to hide Yasa from the sight of his father (Vin I 16); or how the Buddha miraculously hid himself from the sight of a Brahmā (MN I 330). Through another act of supernormal power the Buddha was able to keep at bay Aṅgulimāla, who was in hot pursuit intending to kill the Buddha (MN II 99); and a whole series of miracles happened when the Buddha was staying with Uruvelakassapa (Vin I 24).

Among the Buddha's disciples, Mahāmoggallāna was apparently particularly gifted in this respect, able to shake the palace of the thirty-three gods as well as a monastic building with his toe (MN I 253 and SN V 270).

A discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* reports how another monk conjured up a cool breeze to enable his fellow monks to return comfortably to the monastery after a heavy dinner on a hot day (SN IV 289). When the donor of the meal asked for further performances, the same monk produced fire that burnt up grass piled on top of the donor's cloth, without harming the cloth.

Another monk by the name of Cūlapanthaka was apparently able to multiply himself (Th 563), and the *Vinaya* reports that Devadatta magically changed his appearance in order to impress King Ajātasattu (Vin II 185). These few examples already suffice to show the degree to which supernormal feats and wonders are an integral part of the thought-world of early Buddhism.

In fact, the ability to perform various supernormal feats is part of the account of the gradual path given in the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta* and several other discourses in the *Dīgha-nikāya* (DN I 77). The *Mahāsakuludāyi-sutta* similarly includes such abilities in its description of the Buddha's teach-

ings (MN II 18), as does the *Sampasādanīya-sutta* (DN III 112). The same discourse, however, also makes the pertinent point that, when contrasted to mastery over the mind's tendency to react with likes and dislikes, such supernormal powers are clearly inferior.

The keen interest among ancient Indians in the display of supernormal abilities is also reflected in the *Pāṭika-sutta*, according to which Sunakkhatta decided to leave the Buddhist order because he thought that the Buddha had not shown him any supernormal ability (DN III 3). According to the same discourse, the Buddha clarified that he had never promised to make any such display, and that his teaching leads to freedom from *dukkha* independent of any supernormal performances. The same discourse then continues by reporting several occasions when the Buddha did avail himself of supernormal abilities, culminating in an account of how the Buddha rose up into the air and emitted flames (DN III 27).

The importance given to the possession of supernormal abilities in ancient India is also reflected in the *Susīma-sutta*, according to which a wanderer by the name of Susīma had become a Buddhist monk in order to spy out the Buddha's teaching. When other monks declared to have won final knowledge, Susīma was surprised to find that they would make such claims in spite of being unable to avail themselves of supernatural powers, or of telepathic knowledge of the mind of others, etc. (SN II 123).

Some contemporaries of the Buddha, like the Brahmin Pokkharasāti, apparently held that humans are not able to reach any supernormal abilities (MN II 201). Yet, according to a discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* even Buddhist lay followers, like the householder Citta, had been able to reach a whole range of 'supernormal abilities', comprising the four absorptions and realization of the first three stages of awakening (SN IV 301).

These are in fact the types of supernormal abilities that stand at the very heart of early Buddhism, and it would be such attainments that a discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* has in view when listing ten reflections that a monk or nun should regularly undertake (AN V 88), the tenth of which is to question oneself if any supernormal abilities have been attained, any distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of noble ones.

In short, then, early Buddhism recognizes the ability to perform supernormal feats based on the development of high levels of concentration. According to the early discourses and the *Vinaya*, the Buddha himself and various disciples repeatedly availed themselves of such abilities.

Yet, the public display of such abilities for worldly motives is censured as unbefitting. The same censure also covers public proclamation of having attained supernormal abilities in the more restricted sense of being able to attain absorption or having realized one of the stages of awakening, even though to attain these is central to the undertaking of the Buddhist path to liberation.

20.4 Concentration and Awakening

The role of concentration as a crucial factor for the gaining of awakening is a frequent theme in the discourses, which reiterate again and again that no insight can be developed without concentration. Concentration precedes knowledge (AN I 219) and it is only with a concentrated mind that things can be seen as they really are (SN IV 80). The role of concentration in this respect also underlies its inclusion among the seven factors of awakening.

As a factor of awakening, levels of concentration with and without initial and sustained application of the mind can be employed (SN V 111). The awakening factor of concentration is the result of tranquillity and happiness and in turn leads to

equanimity, a balanced state of mind that results from concentration (SN V 69). The two factors especially related to concentration as a factor of awakening are the "sign of tranquillity" and the "sign of non-distraction" (SN V 105).

Another important set of mental factors where concentration also plays its part are the five faculties or powers. A definition given frequently for concentration as a faculty speaks of gaining concentration by "making relinquishment the object" (e.g. SN V 197), providing in this way an indication of considerable practical relevance. When considered from the perspective of the interrelation between the five faculties, the role of concentration in this context is to counterbalance the faculty of energy, thereby avoiding the arising of agitation and excitement.

Concentration is not only of relevance in relation to the roads to power, the awakening factors and the faculties, but it also has a crucial role to perform in the context of the noble eightfold path, of which it forms the last and culminating factor.

The discourses define "right concentration" in two complementary ways. The most frequently found definition enumerates the four absorptions. Since the development of the noble eightfold path, and with it of the path factor "right concentration", is a prerequisite for awakening, this definition clearly accords a central role to the development of absorption within the early Buddhist scheme of deliverance.

Since some discourses describe the gaining of full awakening based on the first absorption (see MN I 350; MN I 435; AN IV 422 and AN V 343), it would follow that not all four absorptions have to be developed to win full awakening. All four absorptions would however be needed to gain the threefold higher knowledge (*tevijjā*).

Another definition of right concentration, found in a few discourses, does not mention the absorptions (see DN II 217; MN III 71; SN V 21 and AN IV 40). One of these discourses is the

Mahācattārīsaka-sutta, a discourse which defines right concentration as unification of the mind (*cittassekaggatā*) developed in interdependence with the other seven path factors (MN III 71). This definition highlights the fact that in order for concentration to become 'right' concentration, it needs to be developed as part of the noble eightfold path.

Judging from other discourses, the expression 'unification of the mind' is not confined to absorption concentration, since the same expression occurs in relation to walking and standing (AN II 14) or to listening to the *Dhamma* (AN III 175), activities which would not be compatible with absorption attainment. This suggests that this second definition of 'right concentration' would also include levels of *samādhi* that have not yet reached the depth of absorption concentration. In fact, the formulation of this second definition makes it clear that the decisive factor qualifying concentration as 'right' is not merely the depth of concentration achieved, but the purpose for which concentration is employed.

A similar nuance underlies the qualification *sammā*, 'right', which literally means "togetherness", or to be "connected in one". This thus indicates that the criterion for describing concentration as *sammā*, as 'right', is whether it is developed 'together' with the other factors of the noble eightfold path. Of central importance here is the presence of right view, as the forerunner of the whole path, without whose implementation concentration can never be reckoned *sammā*.

According to numerous discourses (e.g. AN III 423), the development of the path factor of 'right concentration' is indispensable for eradicating the fetters and gaining awakening. This brings up the question whether it is necessary to develop *samādhi* to the level of absorption in order to attain any of the four stages of awakening.

Concerning stream-entry, the qualities mentioned in the discourses as essential for the realization of stream-entry do not stipulate the ability to attain absorption (cf. SN V 410). Nor is such an ability included among the qualities that are characteristic of a stream-enterer subsequent to realization (cf. e.g. SN V 357). A necessary condition for winning stream-entry is a state of mind completely free from the five hindrances (AN III 63). Such a removal, however, can take place during walking meditation (It 118) or while listening to the *Dhamma* (SN V 95). This indicates that the ability to gain absorption concentration would not be required for stream-entry.

The same seems to apply to the realization of once-return. Once-returners are so called because they will be reborn only once again in "this world", i.e. the sensual realm. On the other hand, those who have developed the ability to attain absorption are not going to return to "this world" in their next life (AN II 126), but will be reborn in a higher heavenly sphere (i.e. the form realm or the immaterial realm).

This certainly does not imply that a once-returner cannot have absorption attainments. But if all once-returners were absorption attainers, the very concept of a 'once-returner' would be superfluous, since not a single once-returner would ever return 'to this world'. That once-returners do indeed come back to 'this world' is documented in passages that report the rebirth of once-returners in the Tusita realm (AN III 348 and AN V 138).

Hence, although some once-returners may have attained absorption, this does not appear to have been the rule. The same then evidently holds for stream-enterers, in fact the most advanced out of a listing of stream-enterers, the "one-seeder", will be reborn in the human world (AN IV 380), not in a higher heavenly sphere.

When considering the realization of non-return, however, the situation seems to be different. Some discourses point out that the non-returner, in contrast to the once-returner, has fulfilled the development of concentration (AN I 232 and AN IV 380). This indicates that the difference between the two is related to differing levels of concentrative ability. Other discourses relate progress towards the higher two stages of the path, non-returning and full awakening, to having had the experience of the first or higher absorptions.

A particularly explicit statement can be found in the *Mahā-māluṅkya-sutta*, according to which it is impossible to overcome the five higher fetters without undertaking the path required for such overcoming, and this path is contemplation of an absorption experience from an insight perspective (MN I 435). Without having attained absorption, such contemplation can obviously not be undertaken.

The need for the absorptions in order to be able to reach full awakening is also stipulated in the *Sekha-sutta* (MN I 357). The same position is reflected in the opening section of a discourse that describes various approaches to full awakening, which are invariably based on the experience of absorption or an immaterial attainment (AN IV 422).

Judging from this, the development of concentration up to the level of absorption appears to be required for the realization of non-return and thereby also of full awakening. Thus, at least from the perspective of the early discourses, it seems that the so-called "dry insight" approach, which dispenses with the formal development of mental tranquillity up to the level of at least the first absorption, may not be capable of leading to full liberation, but might suffice only for stream-entry and once-return.

In fact, if absorption were simply irrelevant to the progress of insight up to full awakening, it would be difficult to understand

why its practice and development have been given so much attention in the discourses, and why the four absorptions are included under the heading of right concentration as one of the factors of the noble eightfold path.

In sum, the foregoing survey shows that the development of deeper levels of concentration constitutes an important aspect of the meditative training of the mind in early Buddhism and can offer a range of potential benefits.

The importance to be accorded to the development of concentration is expressed vividly in some discourses, which proclaim that one who has respect for the Buddha and his teaching will automatically hold concentration in high regard (AN IV 123). On the other hand, one who looks down on the development of concentration thereby only approves of those who have an unsteady mind (AN II 31). Lack of regard for the development of concentration, so another discourse explains, constitutes one of the causes for the disappearance of the true *Dhamma* (SN II 225). In short, concentration is the path and to be without concentration is the wrong path (AN III 420).

21. Seclusion / *Viveka*

Viveka as "seclusion" is accorded a high value in early Buddhism. A discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* proclaims that the Buddha's teaching is for one who is secluded, not for one who delights in company (AN IV 229). According to another discourse in the same collection, whatever leads to seclusion instead of company should be considered categorically as the true teaching of the Buddha (AN IV 280). The emphasis given in such statements to a secluded life style has its poetic counterpart in the *Khaggavisāṇa-sutta* of the *Sutta-nipāta*, which offers a touching eulogy of the beauty of a solitary life (Sn 35-75).

In what follows, I at first survey the implications of living in physical seclusion (21.1), then turn to the theme of silence (21.2), followed by exploring mental seclusion (21.3).

21.1 Living in Seclusion

The *Mahāsakuludāyi-sutta* reports that some of the Buddha's disciples would only come to join the community every fortnight for the recital of the code of rules (MN II 9). Other passages indicate that monks who live secluded and encourage others in the same quality are praiseworthy indeed (AN V 130). A verse in the *Sutta-nipāta* emphatically instructs that one should dwell in seclusion, which is [reckoned] the supreme form of dwelling among noble ones (Sn 822). Even just to talk about seclusion is commendable, since such a topic for conversation will lead onwards to the final goal (MN III 115).

Hence a monk who does not dwell in solitude nor praises such dwelling had apparently little chance in early Buddhism of being liked and respected by his companions (AN V 166). Even for a monk in higher training seclusion is important, since if he is engaged in many activities and neglects seclusion, decline is to be expected of him (AN III 116). Particularly blameworthy is neglect of seclusion when one's teacher is devoted to a secluded living style. Such blame applies to elder disciples as well as younger ones, in that they do not emulate the example set by their teacher (MN I 14).

To set an example was in fact a prominent reason why the Buddha would live in seclusion himself, in addition to the pleasure he found in secluded dwellings (MN I 23 and AN I 60). The discourses report that after his awakening the Buddha still went regularly on solitary retreat, at times for two weeks (Vin III 68; SN V 12; SN V 320), and at other times even for a period of three months (Vin III 230; SN V 13; SN V 325). Other discourses indicate that distinguished visitors were not allowed to approach the Buddha even when he was only in his daily retreat (DN I 151; DN II 270).

If the Buddha felt being too crowded in by disciples and visitors, he would simply walk off on his own to stay somewhere else in solitude and seclusion (Ud 41). A similar action would also be undertaken by some of his senior disciples, who on one occasion left without taking their leave of the Buddha in order to avoid a crowd of visitors that had come to see the Buddha (AN V 133). On being later informed about their departure, the Buddha wholeheartedly approved of their action.

The secluded living style of the Buddha was a natural expression of his realization, so much so that the two thoughts a Tathāgata frequently has in his mind are thoughts of peace and of seclusion (It 31). In fact, to live a secluded life style is, according to the *Udumbarikasīhanāda-sutta*, a characteristic of all those who have reached awakening (DN III 54).

Yet, to dwell in seclusion is not an easy task, and one who is bereft of concentration will not be fit for this life style (AN V 202), just as a small animal is not fit to imitate the behaviour of an elephant. The *Bhayabherava-sutta* lists several other qualities that will make it difficult to live in seclusion, such as lack of moral purity, or else being under the influence of the five hindrances or of various other unwholesome mental states (MN I 17).

What appears to be implicit in these passages is made explicit in a discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya*, which indicates that to live in community is only a second-rate alternative, recommended to those who do not find solace in seclusion. The verse in question enjoins: "Dwell in remote lodgings, practice for freedom from the fetters, [but] if one does not find satisfaction therein, [then] dwell in the community, protected and mindful" (SN I 154).

Thus dwelling in seclusion is an expression of having reached some degree of maturity in one's practice. Such maturity can, however, arise at a rather early stage in one's practice. The *Vinaya* recognizes this, as it gives a special allowance for a newly ordained monk to be exempted from the otherwise obligatory need to live in dependence on a teacher, in case he finds solace in living in seclusion in a remote forest dwelling (Vin I 92).

Seclusion also comes up in the context of a simile that employs various parts of an elephant to represent praiseworthy qualities. Here seclusion is represented by the elephant's tail (AN III 346), whose function is to keep off flies. In another imagery that takes up the parts of a war chariot, seclusion is one of the weapons of this chariot, together with the absence of ill-will and harmlessness (SN V 6).

Thus seclusion affords the protective environment for intensive and deep meditation practice by keeping off disturbances,

comparable to the elephant's tail that keeps off flies. At the same time, seclusion is a necessary equipment for the battle with one's own defilements, similar to the weaponry of the war-chariot. Needless to say, in this battle seclusion cooperates with the absence of ill-will and harmfulness, two qualities that would make it clear in what respect such a spiritual battle differs from real warfare.

For one who does not delight in seclusion, it will be impossible to come to grips with the mind and develop concentration (AN III 423). The *Mahāsuññata-sutta* clarifies that delight in company will obstruct experiencing the happiness of seclusion (MN III 110). Such seclusion from sensuality, *vivicc' eva kāmehi*, is a necessary condition for attaining absorption. In fact, the happiness experienced with the attainment of the first absorption is none other than the happiness of seclusion (MN I 454). According to a verse in the *Theragāthā*, living alone in the seclusion of a forest, as praised by the Buddha, is very pleasant indeed, once before and behind no one else is found (Th 537-538).

21.2 Silence

An aspect of conduct closely related to seclusion is the maintenance of silence. The disciples of the Buddha were apparently well known among their contemporaries for the high regard they had for silent behaviour (e.g. MN I 514). Thus the *Kandaraka-sutta* reports how a visiting wanderer expressed his admiration for the silence of the congregation of monks (MN I 339). The silent behaviour of the Buddhist monks even caused suspicion to arise in the mind of a king, who on being led to the vicinity of a large assembly of Buddhist monks feared being ambushed, as he could not imagine that such a great congregation could maintain total silence (DN I 50). Even the gods knew about the reputation for silence of the disciples of

the Buddha, and on one occasion Sakka praises the Buddhist monks as silent ones (SN I 236).

Such silent behaviour of the Buddhist monks reflects an injunction by the Buddha that his disciples should either converse on the *Dhamma* or else keep noble silence (MN I 161). "Noble silence" in its true sense, however, would require attaining the second absorption (SN II 273), since it is only when the last vestige of mental activity has been abandoned through overcoming initial and sustained mental application that total inner silence has been attained.

Yet, silence for its own sake was apparently not approved of by the Buddha. According to the *Mahāvagga* of the *Vinaya*, he criticized a group of monks for having spent the three months of the rainy season together in silence, comparing their behaviour to dumb sheep (Vin I 159). This passage needs to be examined in conjunction with the *Cūḷagosiṅga-sutta* and the *Upakkilesa-sutta*, two discourses in which the silent cohabitation of a group of monks met with the Buddha's explicit approval (MN I 207 and MN III 157). This shows that it was not the fact of observing silence as such that was found objectionable in the case of the monks in the *Mahāvagga*.

In fact, silence at the proper time is an aspect of proper monastic conduct, such as when a monk stands silently in front of a house while begging (SN I 174). Silence also forms part of proper behaviour in general, since when being in any assembly one should know when it is time to just keep silent (AN IV 115). A common occurrence of silence is as an expression of agreement, when an invitation is accepted by remaining silent (e.g. DN I 109). Even after partaking of a meal, the Buddha would remain seated for a short time in silence (MN II 139). In the end, then, silence as such does not appear to be censurable in the thought-world of early Buddhism.

A helpful detail for understanding the event reported in the *Mahāvagga* can be found by consulting the parallel version in the (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*. This parallel version reports that these monks had taken a vow to live together in silence in the sense that they would not criticize each other even in the case of a breach of conduct (T XXIII 1044c16 or D *`dul ba ka* 222a1). This suggests that the criticism of their behaviour was directed against the foolish idea that to live together in harmony is to simply ignore improper behaviour.

What becomes clear from the criticism voiced in the *Mahāvagga* is that the observance of silence needs to be paired with wisdom, a requirement that is also evident in the circumstance that, according to the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*, clear comprehension should be practiced when keeping silent (MN I 57). As a verse in the *Dhammapada* points out, one does not become a sage by dint of mere silence (Dhp 268).

Though silence undertaken just for its own sake and without wisdom was not encouraged, silence as an expression of deeper realization was certainly valued in early Buddhism. A discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* reports the complaints of a *deva* that a monk, who earlier was regularly reciting the *Dhamma*, had fallen silent. In reply, the monk explained that he had stopped reciting because he had reached realization (SN I 202).

According to another discourse in the same collection, a group of monks had come to the Buddha to complain that a newly ordained monk was keeping silently to himself, without taking part in communal activities such as sewing robes. The Buddha exonerated the monk, explaining that he was an arahant who was spending his time immersed in absorption (SN II 278).

21.3 Mental Seclusion

The practice of bodily seclusion and silence thus has the purpose of providing a basis for developing mental seclusion. In fact, as a discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* points out, bodily seclusion alone does not suffice. According to this discourse, a monk who lives a very solitary life should also make an effort at mental solitude by leaving behind past and future, and by dwelling free from desire in the present (SN II 283).

The need to supplement bodily seclusion with mental seclusion is also the theme of a set of three similes in the *Mahāsaccaka-sutta* (MN I 240). This set of similes employs the image of a piece of wood that cannot be used to kindle a fire as long as the wood is still wet. This holds true when the wood is still lying in water, but also when the wood has been taken out of the water but is still wet. Only a piece of wood that has become dry is fit for the fire.

Here the need for bodily withdrawal from sensuality corresponds to the need of taking the wood out of the water. Yet, just as the wood also needs to be dry, in the same way the mind needs to be withdrawn from thoughts related to sensuality. As a discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* points out, one who lives in a secluded spot while at the same time still entertaining unwholesome thoughts is only bodily subdued, but lacks being mentally subdued (AN II 137).

Hence based on having heard the teachings, one should dwell bodily as well as mentally withdrawn in order to develop wisdom (AN IV 152). Such withdrawal is a recurrent feature in the description of a monk who, after having received an enigmatic teaching from the Buddha, dwells alone and withdrawn and thereby reaches liberation (e.g. SN III 36).

The Buddha's disciples are encouraged to undertake such secluded practice, for the simple reason that one who lives in seclusion will come to know things as they truly are (SN III 15

or SN IV 80). It could well be for the same reason that the *Dhamma* is said to be realized by the wise each for themselves, that is, singly (e.g. DN II 93).

"The way of the crowd is the way of *saṃsāra* ... against the centripetal attraction of *saṃsāra* ... a tangent directly away from the enveloping vortex into calmness ... this is *kāyaviveka*". Such bodily seclusion then is the basis for developing mental seclusion, "*cittaviveka* ... that gradual journey [away] from the *saṃsāra* within that fuels the outer" *saṃsāra*. Hence "only by solitude ... can one truly approach the Dhamma in its immediacy" (Hudson 1976: 103-104).

The theme of seclusion also has a prominent role to play in relation to higher stages in the development of insight, as the factors of awakening should be developed in dependence on seclusion in order to lead to liberation (MN III 88).

A survey of different types of seclusion can be found in a discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, which distinguishes between three levels of *vivekā* (AN I 241). The first of these is seclusion from unwholesome deeds through virtuous conduct. Next comes seclusion from wrong view through attainment of right view. The third level of seclusion, then, is seclusion from the influxes through final liberation. For an arahant, to be intent on seclusion becomes the most appropriate expression of his or her total seclusion from defilements (AN III 377).

"Having savoured the taste of seclusion,
And the taste of [inner] peace,
[One who] is free from anxiety and evil,
Savours the joyful taste of the *Dhamma*"
(Dhp 205 or Sn 257).

22. Letting go / *Vossagga*

The term *vossagga* stands for "letting go", in the sense of relinquishing, forsaking, or renouncing. Similar to the closely related *paṭinissagga*, "giving up", *vossagga* has a considerable scope of meaning in early Buddhism. Both terms can be seen to throw into relief a central theme that underlies the path to liberation from its outset to its final completion, namely the need to quite literally "let go" of any clinging whatsoever. In what follows, I first examine the implications of "letting go", *vossagga* (22.1), followed by turning to "giving up", *paṭinissagga* (22.2).

22.1 Letting go

Letting go in a relatively mundane sense is part of a set of recommendations given in the *Siṅgālovāda-sutta*, according to which a householder should hand over authority to his wife (DN III 190) and grant leave to his workers at the right time (DN III 191).

These practical instructions already involve a deeper sense of letting go, since in both instances what has to be let go of is control, whether this is in household affairs by handing over authority to the wife, or in labour matters by allowing the workers to take their leave. The desire to control that might render such letting go difficult is in fact simply a manifestation of clinging to a sense of 'I'. Hence even with such mundane types of letting go, as in the present instance, a step is already taken in the direction of what according to early Buddhism needs above all to be given up: clinging to a sense of 'I'.

A correlate to clinging to an 'I' notion is the sense of ownership towards goods and possessions, as well as people, by grasping these as 'mine'. To gradually undermine this sense of ownership, letting go is repeatedly recommended in the early discourses.

Letting go of grasping at one's possessions leads to generosity, which manifests by "delighting in letting go", in the sense of "delighting in giving and sharing" (SN V 395). To be willing to let go in this way will become a source for a good reputation (AN I 226) and lead to a heavenly rebirth (AN IV 266).

Having undertaken such letting go in the form of generosity in an earlier life was one out of the factors due to which Sakka was reborn as the ruler in the heaven of the Thirty-three (SN I 228). The same form of letting go through generosity is also a clear token of faith for a Buddhist disciple (AN I 150), in fact such generosity even features in listings of the four aspects of stream-entry (SN V 397). Having undertaken such letting go of one's possessiveness can then also be turned into an object of meditation, when one practices recollection of one's own generosity (AN III 287).

This does not yet exhaust the relevance of letting go to meditation practice. According to the canonical definition of the faculty of concentration, it is by "having made letting go the object" of one's mind that "one gains concentration and unification of the mind" (SN V 198). The passage that offers this definition continues with the standard description of the four absorptions, thereby indicating that the benefits of such letting go are the gain of concentrative depth of the mind.

In relation to the development of concentration, to let go would stand for letting go of concern with the world of the senses, first of all, and eventually also for letting go of the subjective sense of 'I'. Only once this sense of 'I' goes into abeyance, allowing for a subjective experience of a merger between

observing subject and observed meditative object, will entry into absorption become possible. Preconditions for developing such letting go into deep meditative absorption are faith, energy and mindfulness (SN V 225).

Letting go also has a significant contribution to make in regard to the development of insight. This role comes to the fore in those passages that describe how the seven factors of awakening are to be developed in order to lead to knowledge and liberation. Such development of the factors of awakening should be undertaken based on seclusion, dispassion and cessation, culminating in letting go (e.g. MN III 88).

The same set – being based on seclusion, dispassion and cessation, and culminating in letting go – is relevant not only for the development of the seven factors of awakening, but also for developing the five faculties, the five powers, and for the practice of the noble eightfold path (e.g. SN IV 365-368).

22.2 Giving up

Of similar importance in the thought-world of early Buddhism is *paṭinissagga*, "giving up". Before exploring the range of implications of such giving up, however, it needs to be noted that a discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* makes a point of specifying that not all forms of giving up are recommendable. The type of giving up that leads to an increase in unwholesomeness should be avoided, and only the giving up that leads to an increase in wholesomeness should be undertaken (AN V 192). The same is certainly also the case for letting go.

Thus neither letting go nor giving up are to be practiced indiscriminately. Instead, both should be combined with a clear understanding of their purpose: increase in wholesome qualities and removal of unwholesome qualities.

While the term letting go occurs more frequently in recommendations to let go of material possessions through practising

generosity, giving up makes its appearance often in relation to the need to give up views. Thus various views about the past and the future are better given up (MN II 235); in fact the whole of the *Sallekha-sutta* sets out on the theme of giving up certain views (MN I 40). This theme is also prominent in the treatment given to views in the *Dīghanakha-sutta* (MN I 499). The profundity of this injunction becomes apparent in the concluding section of this discourse, according to which Sāriputta reached full liberation on realizing that the Buddha's recommendation implied giving up through penetrative insight (MN I 501).

A company where right speech prevails is one whose members are able to give up their views instead of insisting on them dogmatically (AN I 76). Those who dogmatically hold on to their views will find it difficult to implement such giving up (e.g. MN I 96). The importance of being able to give up one's view is also reflected in several regulations in the *Vinaya*, which deal with monks or nuns who hold on to views that are mistaken or could lead to a schism (Vin III 173; Vin III 175; Vin III 178; Vin III 184; Vin IV 135; Vin IV 218; Vin IV 236; Vin IV 238; Vin IV 239; Vin IV 241; Vin IV 294).

In the context of actual meditation, giving up makes its appearance as the last of the sixteen steps of mindfulness of breathing. In this context, giving up is preceded by contemplation of impermanence, fading away and cessation (MN III 83). A similar series of progressive steps in the development of insight can, on being applied to feelings in general, lead to freedom from clinging to anything in the world and hence to liberation (MN I 251).

In relation to pleasant feelings, such giving up will lead to overcoming the underlying tendency to lust. In relation to painful feelings, giving up will result in overcoming the underlying tendency to irritation, and in relation to neutral feelings in overcoming the underlying tendency to ignorance (SN IV

211). Hence whatever feelings are experienced, the task is to contemplate their impermanence and eventually give up all involvement with and attachment to them.

Not only in relation to feelings, but anything in the world of experience is best faced with an attitude of giving up. This can be seen in the sections in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* entitled *Rāgapeyyāla*s, which list an impressive range of practices that are related to the basic principle of giving up. After enumerating a fairly comprehensive set of defilements, the *Rāgapeyyāla*s indicate that to 'give up' these defilements can be undertaken through developing:

- tranquillity and insight (AN I 100),
- empty, signless, or undirected concentration (AN I 299),
- the four establishments of mindfulness (AN II 256),
- the four right efforts (AN II 256),
- the four roads to [spiritual] power (AN II 256),
- the five faculties (AN III 277),
- the five powers (AN III 277),
- the six recollections (AN III 452),
- the seven factors of awakening (AN IV 148),
- the noble eightfold path (AN IV 348),
- the four absorptions (AN IV 465),
- the four divine abodes (AN V 360),
- the four immaterial attainments (AN V 360),
- the eight spheres of transcendence (AN IV 348),
- the eight liberations (AN IV 349),
- the attainment of cessation (AN IV 465),
- various types of insight related perceptions (AN III 277; AN III 452; AN IV 148; AN IV 465; AN V 310).

Hence giving up, similar to letting go, spans the whole scale of meditative development. Perfecting giving up, then, requires giving up all craving, whereby the mind will be thoroughly liberated (SN III 13). Such giving up is the theme of the third noble truth, according to which the eradication of *dukkha* re-

quires giving up craving (e.g. SN V 421). It was through such giving up of craving and of any sense of 'I' and 'mine' that the Buddha reached supreme awakening (MN I 6 and MN I 486).

In short, letting go and giving up can be seen to highlight the same theme from complementary perspectives, in that both are of continuous relevance to progress towards liberation. The final goal of such progressive letting go and giving up is but a culmination of the same basic attitude, as can be seen from one of the epithets used to describe the final goal as the "giving up of all substrata" (e.g. MN I 436).

That is, letting go or giving up, if practised wisely in such a way that they result in a growth of wholesome qualities, could be considered a succinct way of representing the central thrust of the teachings of early Buddhism.

"Giving up acquisitiveness,
And delighting in not clinging,
[With] influxes destroyed and brilliant [with wisdom],
These have attained *Nibbāna* in this world" (Dhp 89).

23. Emptiness / *Suññatā*

Suññatā is an abstract noun formed from the adjective *suñña*, which means "empty" or "void". It is noteworthy that in the Pāli discourses the adjective *suñña* occurs with a much higher frequency than the corresponding noun *suññatā*. This is not a matter of mere philological interest, but points to an emphasis in early Buddhism on qualifying phenomena as 'being empty' rather than on an abstract state of empty-'ness'.

My examination in the following pages proceeds from an investigation of the significance of the qualification 'empty' in early Buddhism (23.1) via a study of the *Cūḷasuññata-sutta* and the *Mahāsuññata-sutta* (23.2-3) to a survey of other early discourses related to emptiness (23.4).

23.1 The Significance of the Term 'Empty'

The word empty (*suñña*) occurs often in a straightforward and simple sense to qualify a location as empty in the most common sense of the word. A typical example for this is a recurrent reference in the discourses to an 'empty place', which due to being devoid of people, noise, distraction, etc. is a place suitable for meditative seclusion (DN II 291). To find delight in the seclusion afforded by such an empty place counts as an important requirement for one gone forth (AN V 88). The same quality, however, renders such an empty place less suitable as a resort for gathering alms (MN I 519) or for proclaiming one's teachings (DN I 175).

According to another usage of a similar type, as long as there are those who undertake the noble eightfold path, the world

will not be empty of arahants (DN II 151). The quality of being empty can also be predicated of a group of people, in order to specify that they are bereft of a certain quality. Thus, the members of a particular group of ascetics can be reckoned as being empty of going to heaven, in the sense that none of them will be able to reach a celestial rebirth (MN I 483).

Though qualifying a place or a group of people as empty of something may at first sight appear to be far from the deeper connotations of emptiness, the two senses are actually intertwined. To speak of emptiness, as far as the early discourses are concerned, is necessarily to speak of a particular phenomenon as empty of something.

Hence even the peak of emptiness, the realization of full awakening and unsurpassable mental freedom, is "empty of". Empty of what? Empty of lust, anger and delusion (MN I 298).

Some passages use the expression empty in both a common and a deeper sense, for example when employing the image of an empty village as a symbol for the six sense-bases (SN IV 173). Though the primary sense of *suñña* here is clearly to be physically empty, in the sense that this village has been deserted by people, the discourse in question brings in the deeper notions of *suñña* by explaining that when a wise person investigates the senses he or she will find that they are empty, void and vain. In this way the empty quality of the village, in the sense of being devoid of people, finds its equivalent in the empty nature of the senses, highlighting that the senses are devoid of a self.

A similar nuance can also be found in a set of similes for the five aggregates found in the *Pheṇa-sutta*. Though this discourse does not use the term *suñña*, it does employ two terms used as near equivalents of *suñña* in the above simile of the empty village: void and vain. According to the *Pheṇa-sutta*, closer inspection will reveal each of the five aggregates to be

vain, void and unsubstantial. The same discourse offers a set of similes illustrative of the manifestation of this void and vain nature of each aggregate:

The unsubstantial nature of material form is similar to a lump of foam carried away by a river; feelings are like the impermanent bubbles that arise on the surface of water during rain; perception is as illusory as a mirage; volitions are devoid of essence like a plantain tree (since it has no heartwood); and consciousness is as deceptive as a magician's performance (SN III 142). The *Pheṇa-sutta* concludes with a verse envisaging eradication of the fetters and attainment of the final goal as the potential outcome of contemplating the void and unsubstantial nature of the aggregates in this manner.

23.2 The *Cūḷasuññata-sutta*

A lead over from the empty nature of a location to deeper aspects of emptiness as a step by step meditative development can be found in the *Cūḷasuññata-sutta*, the "Smaller Discourse on Emptiness" (MN III 104). This discourse begins with Ānanda inquiring about an earlier statement by the Buddha, according to which the Buddha was often "dwelling in emptiness".

In order to show Ānanda how to achieve such dwelling, the Buddha directs Ānanda's attention to the immediate environment where they are staying. He points out that the place is empty of the human hustle and bustle of township. Giving attention to this absence as a type of emptiness experience yields a unitary perception of the forest.

Based on such a unitary perception of the forest, a meditative deepening of emptiness unfolds. This proceeds from a unitary perception of earth, via the four immaterial attainments, to signless concentration of the mind.

Each step of this meditative deepening of emptiness requires a clear awareness of what has been transcended at each point, in the sense of what the present experience is "empty of". When, for example, the perception of earth has been transcended by developing the perception of boundless space, this experience of boundless space is seen as empty of any perceptual experience of earth.

The meditative deepening of emptiness described in this discourse requires at the same time a clear awareness of what is still present. Thus, when proceeding from the perception of earth to the perception of boundless space, the experience of boundless space is seen as "not empty" (*asuñña*) of the perception of space. It is precisely this 'non-emptiness' that needs to be left behind in order to proceed further.

Leaving behind the 'non-emptiness' of the perception of space leads to the next experience, namely to attaining the perception of boundless consciousness. This step, then, is "empty of" perceptions of boundless space. Yet, this same experience is "not empty", in so far as the perception of boundless consciousness is still present.

Properly undertaking this genuine, undistorted, pure and gradual descent into emptiness will lead to the destruction of the influxes. Once this has been achieved and one's experiences are forever "empty of" any perception coloured by these unwholesome influxes, the supreme and unsurpassable peak of emptiness has been reached.

This presentation in the *Cūḷasuññata-sutta* has several important ramifications and thus well deserves to be reckoned outstanding among discourses that are "related to [the topic] of emptiness" and therefore worthy of special attention (SN II 267; SN V 407; AN I 72 and AN III 107).

One of these implications is that the *Cūḷasuññata-sutta*'s treatment shows the early Buddhist concept of emptiness to

stand for a qualification, not an entity. This is reflected in the repeated instruction that the meditating monk is to consider his experiences as "empty of" what has been transcended, but at the same time as "not empty of" what is still there.

In fact, the *Cūḷasuññata-sutta* employs the Pāli term *suññatā* only once the peak of realization through the destruction of the influxes has been reached. In contrast, the description of all the preceding stages merely uses the adjective *suñña*, "empty". This indicates that the *Cūḷasuññata-sutta* reckons only the destruction of the influxes as "emptiness", furthermore qualified as "unsurpassable". The preceding stages are only the "entry into emptiness", but nothing short of total freedom from the influxes deserves to be reckoned as "emptiness" true and proper.

Other Pāli discourses also use the term "emptiness" predominantly in relation to various realization experiences. This nuance can best be seen in the *Vinaya*, which counts the claim to emptiness liberation, emptiness concentration or emptiness attainment among those claims which, if spoken as a deliberate lie, merit expulsion from the monastic community (Vin III 95). This shows that for a monk or a nun to lay claim to such emptiness experience was equivalent to laying claim to high realization.

Another implication of the *Cūḷasuññata-sutta* is that the proper approach to a realization of emptiness, depicted step by step in this discourse and qualified as "genuine, undistorted and pure", is gradual. According to the finale of the discourse, all those who have gained the supreme and unsurpassable peak of emptiness, the destruction of the influxes, have in fact followed this gradual approach.

The final stages of this gradual approach, described in the *Cūḷasuññata-sutta*, lead from signless concentration of the mind to the destruction of the influxes. In order to navigate this

important junction, the discourse instructs to contemplate the conditioned and impermanent nature of one's meditative experience. This indicates that, in order to attain the peak of emptiness, insight into conditionality and impermanence need to be developed. Moreover, the resultant insight perspective needs to be directed towards one's own experience of emptiness.

The foregoing thus highlights that contemplation of emptiness has to be combined with the development of insight into the conditioned and impermanent nature of reality, an insight to be applied directly to one's present meditative experience. Other discourses confirm this need. They indicate that even the deepest and most sublime levels of meditative experience have to be contemplated as impermanent and unsatisfactory, in addition to being contemplated as empty (e.g. MN I 435).

23.3 The *Mahāsuññata-sutta*

The need to complement meditation on emptiness with insight into impermanence is also evident in the "Greater Discourse on Emptiness", the *Mahāsuññata-sutta* (MN III 109). In fact, the meditative instruction in relation to emptiness delivered in this discourse culminates in contemplation of the impermanent nature of the five aggregates as the means to go beyond the conceit 'I am'.

It is remarkable that the *Cūḷasuññata-sutta* and the *Mahāsuññata-sutta*, whose titles indicate that their main topic is emptiness, both stress the importance of impermanence. In this way, these two discourses implicitly draw attention to the danger of mistaking the relative stability of deep meditative experiences to be indicative of some type of permanency, a mistake that can occur even when the object of such deep experiences is of an empty type.

The *Mahāsuññata-sutta* moreover highlights the importance of overcoming the conceit 'I am'. The conceit 'I am' is but a

manifestation of ignorance and at the same time the pivotal point for the genesis of craving. The 'I am' conceit thereby stands at the root of the human predicament, and unwholesome mental states and reactions are but its multifarious outgrowths. The idea of selfhood underlying this conceit is the main target for emptiness meditation. Another discourse explains that to qualify the world as empty simply means that it is empty of a self and of what belongs to a self (SN IV 54).

The notion of a self cannot be changed by a mere change of grammar or language. The task is not to replace 'I' with another concept, even if this should be the concept of emptiness. The task, rather, is to become aware of the sense of 'I' pervading experience, a sense of 'I' that turns the process of experiencing into 'I am' experiencing, and causes experience to be appropriated as 'my' experience.

Returning to the *Mahāsuññata-sutta*, the discourse also indicates that contemplation of emptiness has to be applied not only to oneself, "internally", but "externally" as well. Clearly an all-inclusive carrying out of the contemplation is required and every aspect of experience should become part of this comprehensive vision of emptiness.

The same contemplation should, moreover, not be confined to formal meditation, but needs to be related with everyday activities. The *Mahāsuññata-sutta* also indicates how this can be achieved: by staying aloof from desire and aversion while walking, standing, sitting and lying down. In relation to communication, one should avoid useless worldly topics and engage solely in speech related to the practice and the path.

The discourse also clarifies that to develop insight into emptiness means to leave the three unwholesome types of thought behind and to overcome the attractional pull of the five types of sensual pleasure. These instructions clearly indicate that a

genuine realization of emptiness is not compatible with engagement in sensuality.

23.4 Other Passages on Emptiness

The need to apply emptiness to everyday activities recurs in the *Piṇḍapātapārisuddhi-sutta* (MN III 294), a discourse also concerned with "dwelling in emptiness". This discourse opens with the Buddha lauding Sāriputta, who has just emerged from emptiness meditation. Proclaiming such dwelling in emptiness to be an abiding of superior men, the Buddha draws attention to the need of combining such meditative depth with everyday activities. As a practical example, the discourse recommends that a monk should stay aloof from desire and aversion in regard to whatever he experiences while begging alms.

The *Piṇḍapātapārisuddhi-sutta* continues by praising aloofness from sensual pleasures. It describes how a monk who has left behind concern for sensual pleasures overcomes the five hindrances, gains insight into the five aggregates and develops different aspects of the early Buddhist path of meditation. Here dwelling in emptiness occurs again within the framework of a comprehensive meditative development that includes both tranquillity and insight.

Contemplation of emptiness as a form of *samādhi* leads to removing all lust, hate and delusion (AN I 299) and thus constitutes the path to the unconditioned (SN IV 360). Such empty concentration often occurs in the discourses as part of a set of three concentrations, together with signless and undirected concentration (DN III 219). Emptiness occurs also together with signlessness and undirectedness as the three types of contact experienced when emerging from the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling (SN IV 295). These presentations underline the point made already above, namely that emptiness as a representative of not-self stands in an insepara-

ble relation to the other two characteristics of existence, impermanence and unsatisfactoriness.

Contemplation of emptiness apparently has some affinity with the third of the four immaterial attainments, the sphere of nothingness, since one of the different ways to reach this deep concentrative experience is through contemplating "this is empty of a self and what belongs to a self" (MN II 263).

The real goal to be achieved by contemplating "this is empty of a self and what belongs to a self", however, is liberation. As a verse in the *Sutta-nipāta* proclaims, by rooting out the view of self and by looking on the entire world of experience as empty, one will be able to transcend even death (Sn 1119).

The same theme, though without explicit use of the term empty, recurs in other verses of the *Sutta-nipāta*, according to which the entire world is without any essence (Sn 937), as are all acquisitions and all forms of existence (Sn 364 and Sn 5).

These statements find their complement in a passage from the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, which defines the "essence" of phenomena to be liberation (AN IV 339). With a subtle sense of humour, this discourse introduces a shift or perspective by taking "essence" to represent what is "essential". What is essential, then, is liberation, which is but the realization of the total absence of any essence in the world.

The teachings on emptiness have also found eloquent expression in early canonical poetry. A verse in the *Dhammapada* takes as its theme those who have reached the acme of emptiness by destroying the influxes. Such accomplished ones, the verse indicates, have emptiness as their resort or pasture. The implications of having such an empty type of pasture, the verse draws out in the following manner:

"Those whose pasture is liberation,
empty and free from any mark,
their path is hard to track,
like that of birds in the sky" (Dhp 93).

24. Liberation / *Vimutti*

"Liberation", *vimutti*, is the final goal of the early Buddhist path and hence the ultimate purpose of the entire *Dhamma*. In order to explore the various facets of liberation, I will at first survey the eight deliverances, *vimokkha* (24.1), followed by turning to liberation of the mind (24.2). Next I examine the five occasions for attaining liberation, *vimuttāyatana* (24.3) and the different types of liberated beings (24.4). In the final section, I turn to the path to liberation (24.5).

24.1 The Eight Deliverances

In the Pāli discourses, the term *vimokkha*, "deliverance", occurs at times on a par with *vimutti*, "liberation". In a more specific sense, however, *vimokkha* stands for the eight types of deliverances.

The eight types of *vimokkha* are eight levels of "deliverance" that involve progressive degrees of mastery in the realm of concentration meditation in particular, with only the last deliverance bearing a direct relation to the development of insight. Though the final goal of deliverance or liberation requires going beyond any attainment in the sphere of tranquillity, early Buddhism nevertheless recognizes and treats in considerable detail levels of deliverance that fall short of being the final goal. Thus the eight deliverances form part of listings of the essentials of the Buddha's teaching provided in the *Saṅgīti-sutta* and the *Dasuttara-sutta* (DN III 262 and DN III 288), the latter specifying that these deliverances "should be realized", *sachikātabbā*.

The degree to which the eight deliverances were considered an integral part of the early Buddhist path of practice is in fact

reflected in several discourses. Thus the *Saḷāyatanavibhaṅga-sutta* compares the Buddha's ability to teach these eight deliverances to the ability of the trainer of an elephant, a horse, or an ox. While such a trainer only teaches the animals how to proceed in one of the four directions, the Buddha's disciples learn how to proceed towards eight directions, which are the eight deliverances (MN III 222).

A listing of various practices that lead to overcoming defilements includes the eight deliverances (AN IV 349); and according to the *Mahāsakuludāyi-sutta* many disciples of the Buddha reached direct knowledge through attaining these eight deliverances (MN II 12).

Hence one who develops the eight deliverances even for a short fraction of time does the teacher's bidding, and would not be eating the country's alms food in vain (AN I 40). The ability to attain these eight is the distinctive mark of an *arahant* liberated both ways, *ubhatobhāga-vimutto*, who is able to attain the eight deliverances in forward and backward order (DN II 71).These eight deliverances comprise (DN II 112 or AN IV 306):

1) seeing material forms while being possessed of material form, *rūpī rūpāni passati*;
2) seeing forms externally while being percipient of no materiality internally, *ajjhattaṃ arūpasaññī bahiddhā rūpāni passati*;
3) being resolved upon the beautiful, *'subhan't'eva adhimutto hoti*;
4) attaining the sphere of boundless space;
5) attaining the sphere of boundless consciousness;
6) attaining the sphere of nothingness;
7) attaining the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception;
8) attaining the cessation of perceptions and feelings.

The Pāli discourses that present this listing of the eight deliverances do not provide further information on their implications. According to an explanation given in the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, the first deliverance involves developing the perception of a colour like blue, yellow, red, or white. This colour, or more precisely the 'sign' of this colour, the *nimitta*, is at first to be given attention "internally" on oneself, *ajjhatta paccatta*. Once this has been well developed the same coloured sign is to be given attention "externally", *bahiddhā*, leading to a perception of materiality in terms of the respective colour internally as well as externally (Paṭis II 38).

The *Atthasālinī* further specifies that to perceive a colour internally refers to developing a *jhāna* based on taking a colour of some part of one's own body as the object (As 190). Thus to develop perception of the colour 'blue', the hair, bile or the pupil of the eye should be used; for 'yellow' the fat, the skin or the yellow spot of the eyes; for 'red' the flesh, the blood, the tongue, the palms of the hand and feet or the red of the eyes; and for 'white' the bones, the teeth, the nails, or the white of the eye.

Next, according to the *Atthasālinī*'s explanation, the *jhāni*c vision of these colours should be developed externally by way of a *kasiṇa* meditation object. The second of the eight deliverances would then represent the case of someone who does not develop the internal vision of colours described under the first deliverance, but instead directly proceeds to develop the vision of these colours with the help of an external device.

The interpretation offered in the *Atthasālinī* seems somewhat forced. For example, it is not easy to imagine how someone uses the white colour of his or her own bones as a meditation object, unless one has just had a type of accident that renders the bones visible, but then the repercussions of such a condition on one's physical well-being would probably make it difficult to develop the vision of the white bones into a deeper

level of concentration. The same would to a lesser extent also apply to looking at one's own flesh or blood in order to develop a perception of redness. For a monk or a nun to be able to look directly at the hair of their own head, *kesa*, would also not be an easy task, as due to regularly shaving their hair would not be long enough to be seen directly.

It is also not clear how such hair or even bile could be perceived as blue; or how the dark skin of an Indian could be perceived as yellow or, in the case of the palms, as red; or how one would be able to see colours in the pupil of one's own eye. All these visions would only be possible if one were to resort to an external aid such as a mirror, in which case the use of another external object of the respective colour would be more straightforward. Besides, by resorting to a mirror the distinction drawn in the *Atthasālinī* between internal and external visions would be lost.

Thus the *Atthasālinī*'s explanation of the first and second deliverance seems contrived, perhaps being modelled on the eight spheres of transcendence, *abhibhāyatana*, several of which do involve external visions of forms whose colour is blue, yellow, red or white (e.g. DN III 260).

An alternative explanation of the first two deliverances could be gathered from the *Mahāvibhāṣā* and the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra* (T XXVII 437c29 and T XXV 215a14). These works agree with the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* and the *Atthasālinī* that the first deliverance takes parts of one's body as its object, such as hair, bones, flesh, etc. They differ in as much as these objects are not to be seen directly, but rather are to be contemplated in a recollective manner from the perspective of the unattractiveness and impure nature of these parts of one's body.

Once the first deliverance has been developed in this way, the same mode of contemplation is then to be undertaken in relation to the bodies of others, which, when carried out suc-

cessfully, constitutes the second deliverance. The *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra* indicates that to progress in this way from the first to the second deliverance is to proceed from at first having reached some degree of freedom from conceit and attachment in relation to one's own bodily appearance to subsequently developing a similar degree of freedom from attraction and passion in regard to the bodies of others (T XXV 215a16),

The undertaking of such recollective contemplation of the anatomical parts of the body is described in detail in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* (MN I 57), according to which one should "review", *paccavekkhati*, the whole body from the soles of the feet to the top of the head in terms of the various types of impurity such as hair, flesh, bone etc. Similar to the progression from the first to the second deliverance, the *satipaṭṭhāna* instructions also proceed from contemplating one's own body, *ajjhatta*, to contemplation of the bodies of others, *bahiddhā*.

In both cases, one need not actually see these different parts, which in the case of bones etc. would require supernormal powers or surgery, but one mentally reviews the constitution of the physical body to the extent to which one is familiar with it. In order to facilitate such familiarity, the *Visuddhimagga* offers a detailed description of various anatomical parts to be reviewed in this manner (Vism 248 - 265). According to a discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, to review the anatomical constitution of the body in the way described in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* leads to the perception of unattractiveness, *asubha-saññā* (AN V 109).

The *Mahāvibhāṣā* then explains that, once the perception of unattractiveness has been developed, the third deliverance comes into its place to counterbalance excessive disgust and negativity, by developing perception of what is beautiful, *subha* (T XXVII 437c28). In sum, in this way a meaningful progression for the first three deliverances could be reached.

On reading the bare instructions given in the Pāli discourses, one would perhaps not come to the conclusion that the first two deliverances require contemplation of the body's nature as bereft of beauty, *asubha*. Yet, the idea that they refer to some form of *kasiṇa* meditation would also not naturally come to a reader who is not familiar with the explanations given in the *Atthasālinī*. When compared with the latter, the suggestions given in the *Mahāvibhāṣā* and the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra* appear more straightforward and practically feasible. They also result in a coherent dynamics of development for the first three deliverances.

According to the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, to be resolved upon the beautiful, the third of the eight deliverances, requires the development of the four divine abodes, *brahmavihāra*, as a liberation of the mind in the form of a boundless radiation. The *Paṭisambhidāmagga* explains that due to such development beings appear as non-repulsive, *appaṭikula*, hence one has reached the liberation of being resolved upon the beautiful (Paṭis II 39). The *Atthasālinī*, however, understands the third deliverance to refer to *jhāna* attainment through a colour device that is thoroughly purified (As 191). This gloss is noteworthy as it shows the degree to which the explanations in the *Atthasālinī* are influenced by the idea of *kasiṇa* meditation, so much so that the *Atthasālinī* would even venture to go against the otherwise highly respected exposition given in the *Paṭisambhidāmagga.*

A discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* relates loving kindness alone to the "beautiful deliverance", *subha vimokkha* (SN V 119), whereas the other three divine abodes lead to the subsequent types of deliverances, namely those related to the first three immaterial spheres. The *Pāṭika-sutta* clarifies that at the time of having attained the beautiful deliverance one will not perceive phenomena as 'ugly', but rather as 'beautiful' (DN III 34). The commentary then explains that this passage refers to

an attainment that is based on a colour device, *vaṇṇa-kasiṇa* (Sv III 830), thereby again opting for an explanation that involves *kasiṇa* meditation, somewhat against the indications provided by the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* discourse.

From the perspective of the explanation of the first two deliverances given in the *Mahāvibhāṣā* and the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra*, however, the practice of loving kindness would fit the series well, since the development of loving kindness would indeed counterbalance any negativity that might have arisen through excessive contemplation of the repulsive nature of one's own body or that of others. The contrast provided in the *Pāṭika-sutta* between perceiving phenomena as ugly or as beautiful could also be related to this topic, in the sense of highlighting that with the third deliverance the perceptions of lack of beauty, *asubha*, that had been developed earlier, are now definitely left behind.

Whatever may be the final word on the implications of the first three deliverances, the remaining set is quite straightforward. Deliverances four to seven involve the attainment of the four immaterial spheres. In practical terms, based on the mental stability of the fourth *jhāna* any perception related to materiality or diversity is to be overcome in order to attain the sphere of boundless space. Next the experience of space is attended to from the perspective of the consciousness that experiences the sphere of boundless space, which then leads to attaining the sphere of boundless consciousness. Giving attention to the cessation aspect of the experience of boundless consciousness leads to attaining the sphere of nothingness. Further practice results in subduing perceptions until a state is reached which can neither be reckoned as percipient nor as non-percipient, this being the entry into the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.

With the final of the eight deliverances, the sense of true liberation from a Buddhist perspective comes to the fore, as the

cessation of perception and feeling would require the development of insight up to the level of non-return or *arahant*-hood (AN III 194 and Vism 702).

24.2 Liberation of the Mind

Similar to the case of *vimokkha*, the Pāli term *vimutti*, "liberation", covers both final liberation through the destruction of all unwholesomeness as well as types of liberation that fall short of being the ultimate goal in early Buddhism. The discourses express the idea of a gradation of types of liberation by distinguishing *vimokkha* (which in the present context is employed as an equivalent to *vimutti*) into three types: "worldly", *sāmisa*, "unworldly", *nirāmisa*, and "more unworldly than unworldly", *nirāmisā nirāmisatara* (SN IV 237). Here the worldly type stands for experiences of liberation or deliverance related to the four *jhāna*s. Its unworldly counterpart covers attainment of the immaterial spheres; while the type of *vimokkha* that is more unworldly than unworldly is retrospective knowledge of the successful deliverance of the mind from passion, anger and delusion.

Before proceeding, it needs to be noted that the use of the qualifications "worldly" and "unworldly" in this passage is best understood relatively, as the same discourse also applies the qualification "unworldly" to the *jhāna*s. Thus the *jhāna*s of the form sphere are considered as a "worldly" type of deliverance only in comparison to more sublime types of deliverances.

Instances of the first of these three levels of liberation or deliverance would be the divine abodes, *brahmavihāra*, whose boundless radiation into all directions constitutes a "liberation of the mind", *cetovimutti*. During such a liberation based on the divine abodes one is 'liberated' from hostility and ill-will, *avera* and *avyāpajjha* (e.g. MN I 38). The absence of hostility and ill-will is envisaged for each of the four divine abodes, in the sense that each of these four transcends, in its own particu-

lar way, the limitations imposed by those two unwholesome mental qualities.

Of the four divine abodes, it is in particular liberation of the mind through loving kindness that is most prominently the "escape", *nissaraṇa*, from ill-will, *vyāpāda*. Loving kindness has a remarkable potential to liberate the mind from the influence of ill-will. This is the case to such an extent that it is impossible to say of someone who has developed loving kindness as a liberation of the mind that ill-will still invades his or her mind and remains (DN III 248). Liberation of the mind through "compassion", *karuṇā*, performs the same function in regard to "vexation", *vihesā*; liberation of the mind through "sympathetic joy", *muditā*, in regard to "discontent", *arati*; and liberation of the mind through "equanimity", *upekkhā*, in regard to "passion", *rāga*.

Due to such different aspects in the effect and also in the actual experience of liberation of the mind by way of any of the four divine abodes, each can be reckoned as a type of liberation of the mind in its own right, hence there are *mettā cetovimutti, karuṇā cetovimutti, muditā cetovimutti* and *upekkhā cetovimutti* (DN III 248).

The experience of these types of liberation of the mind is moreover a liberation from any confines, as the mind radiates the respective divine abode into all possible directions, above and below, until one's experience becomes truly great and unbounded, *mahaggata* and *appamāṇa*. The expression *appamāṇā cetovimutti*, "boundless liberation of the mind", quite appropriately reflects such unbounded radiation (MN III 146).

An image provided in the discourses illustrates this all-pervasive nature of a boundless liberation of the mind with the example of a trumpeter able to make himself heard in all four directions (e.g. MN II 207). Liberation of the mind through the divine abodes is unlimited not only in a spatial sense, but also

from a karmic perspective, as any limiting action cannot persist and remain, *yaṃ pamāṇakataṃ kammaṃ, na taṃ tatrāvasissati, na taṃ tatrāvatiṭṭhati*. The commentaries explain that the karmic fruit to be expected of the development of liberation of the mind through the divine abodes will temporarily overrule the negative karmic influence of another and more 'limited' deed belonging to the sensuous field (Ps III 449). Thus "just as petty small noises get drowned by the all-pervading sound of a conch-shell, petty emotions such as attachment and aversion associated with sense data find no foothold in a well developed mind suffused with infinite benevolence" (de Silva 1978: 124).

The fruitfulness of loving kindness as a liberation of the mind is of such superior degree that it could be compared to the radiance of the moon that outshines the light of any other star, or to the rising sun that dispels all darkness, or to the rise of the morning star at dawn (It 19). Liberation of the mind through loving kindness can even become a means of progress towards non-return (AN V 300), and its practice certainly helps to weaken the fetters (AN IV 150 and It 21).

In fact, all of the divine abodes can become tools for progress to the highest liberation, *uttarivimutti*, once they are combined with the development of the factors of awakening (SN V 119). In regard to liberation of the mind through loving kindness in particular, other and somewhat more mundane benefits of its undertaking are that one will sleep well and wake up well; one will not be disturbed by evil dreams and be protected from hostile actions by others; one will find it easy to concentrate; one will have a pleasant countenance and be liked by men and other beings; one will pass away without confusion and be reborn in a non-sensual heavenly world (AN V 342; see also AN IV 150).

Liberation of the mind through loving kindness will also be of protective assistance when having to face non-human beings (SN II 264), whereas liberation of the mind through sympa-

thetic joy appears to be particularly related to communal harmony (AN I 243).

Thus, even though this type of liberation of the mind falls short of being the final goal, its 'liberating' effects are remarkable. These cover mental freedom in a spatial as well as emotional sense, and lead to temporary freedom from the effects of some types of unwholesome karmic retribution as well as to freedom from such unpleasant experiences as sleepless nights, bad dreams and hostile attitudes by others. In view of this range of 'liberating' effects, it becomes quite understandable why the development and benefits of the practice of the divine abodes as boundless liberations of the mind has been given so much attention in the Pāli discourses.

A related type of liberation of the mind would be the "liberation of the mind that has become great", *mahaggatā cetovimutti*, which designates the ability to pervade a certain area with one's meditation object, be this the area around the root of a tree, the area of a whole village, or even the area of the whole earth (MN III 146). The fact that "liberation of the mind that has become great" is distinguished from "boundless liberation of the mind" suggests that its meditative pervasion would involve some other meditation object, which according to the commentarial explanation is the development of *jhāna* based on a *kasiṇa* object (Ps IV 200).

Yet another type of liberation of the mind is the "neither-painful-nor-pleasant liberation of the mind", *adukkhamasukhā cetovimutti*, which stands for the mental freedom attained with the fourth absorption, *jhāna* (MN I 296). In this case the 'liberating' feature is no longer related to any spatial pervasion, but to the fact that through attaining the fourth *jhāna* the mind has become 'liberated' by attaining immovability, *aniñjita* (MN I 455). The mind has thereby become totally aloof from the pleasure-pain dichotomy, whose transcendence is the very precondition for entry into fourth *jhāna* attainment, *sukhassa*

ca pahānā, dukkhassa ca pahānā, pubb' eva somanassa-domanassānaṃ atthagamā (e.g. DN I 75).

Based on the mental strength of the fourth *jhāna*, the immaterial attainments can be developed, which correspond to four types of deliverances, *vimokkha*, in the eightfold standard listing. Out of these four, the attainment of the sphere of nothingness is also reckoned as a type of liberation of the mind on its own, the *akiñcaññā cetovimutti* (MN I 297). According to the description given in the discourses, to attain this type of mental liberation requires giving attention to nothingness, *n'atthi kiñci* (e.g. MN I 41).

The *Āneñjasappāya-sutta* depicts three additional modes that lead to the sphere of nothingness, the first of which involves the reflection that the cessation of all perceptions is peaceful; the second requires insight into selflessness; and the third is based on contemplating that one does not belong to anything or own anything (MN II 263).

The first of these three involves perceiving the cessation of all perceptions as peaceful and thus bears some relation to another type of liberation, the "mental liberation through signlessness", *animittā cetovimutti* (given that the counterpart to any perception, *saññā*, is the "sign", *nimitta*, of what is perceived). Such mental liberation through signlessness is the escape from all signs (DN III 249; see in more detail Harvey 1986). Its attainment requires not giving attention to any sign and directing awareness to the signless element (MN I 297).

The expression "signless deliverance", *animitta vimokkha*, further qualified to be also a "deliverance" related to "emptiness", *suññata vimokkha*, occurs in two *Dhammapada* verses that clearly intend the attainment of final liberation (Dhp 92-93). Concentration on signlessness is in fact one of the different paths to the deathless (SN IV 360). Yet, meditative experiences of signlessness can also be related to lesser levels of de-

velopment. This can be seen from a discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, which describes how a monk might pride himself on having attained concentration of the mind that is signless, but then through over socializing comes under the influence of passion and eventually disrobes (AN III 397). Hence the signless liberation of the mind also covers types of liberation that are only temporary.

This is in fact the distinguishing mark of the types of liberation of the mind discussed so far, in that they do not in themselves imply the attainment of a liberation that is perpetual, but may only be of a temporary type, *sāmāyika*. That is, by having attained a liberation of the mind one has not necessarily gone beyond the reach of Māra (MN I 156). To be able to reach even a temporary liberation of the mind does require devotion to practice in seclusion (MN III 110 and Sn 54), and is therefore a token of progress on the path (see also AN III 349 and AN V 139). Yet, such success is only temporary, as such liberation of the mind can be lost again.

This was apparently the case with Godhika, who according to a discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* lost his liberation of the mind again and again (SN I 120). The commentary explains that this happened due to physical illness (Spk I 183). Other reasons for loss of temporary liberation of the mind are delight in excessive activity, talk, sleep and socialization; or else failing to properly examine the mind that has experienced a liberation (AN III 173).

The attainment of a temporary liberation of the mind can even become an obstruction to reaching the final goal, if due to such lofty experience one loses inspiration for progressing towards the cessation of personality and the destruction of ignorance (AN II 165). Such a predicament would be like taking hold of a branch that is smeared with resin. Hence such liberations of the mind should be developed and made use of without allowing that the sticky resin of attachment prevents letting go

of them when the time has come to progress towards final liberation.

A temporary liberation of the mind also appears to be intended by the expression “noble liberation”, *ariyā vimutti*, which a discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* defines as a manifestation of the faculty of concentration, *samādhindriya* (SN V 223). Once the term “noble liberation” is additionally qualified as “foremost”, *ariyā paramā vimutti*, however, it does stand for “supreme liberation”, *adhivimutti* (DN I 174). The same is the case for the term “noble deliverance”, *ariya vimokkha*, which occurs in another discourse as a designation for final liberation through penetrative insight into not-self and the relinquishment of all clinging (MN II 265). A liberation of the mind that requires such penetrative insight into not-self is “the liberation of the mind through emptiness”, *suññatā cetovimutti*. This is to be attained through contemplating that “this is empty of a self and what pertains to a self”, *suññam idam attena vā attaniyena vā* (MN I 297).

Notably, the same insight into selflessness constitutes the second of the three modes that lead to the sphere of nothingness according to the *Āneñjasappāya-sutta* (MN II 263). Moreover, according to the *Mahāsuññata-sutta*, the Buddha would dwell in the attainment of internal emptiness by not giving attention to any signs, *sabbanimittānaṃ amanasikārā ajjhattaṃ suññataṃ upasampajja viharituṃ* (MN III 111). This points to some degree of relatedness between liberation of the mind through emptiness, *suññatā cetovimutti*, and the liberations of the mind through nothingness and through signlessness.

In fact, the boundless liberation of the mind and the liberations of the mind through nothingness and signlessness - *appamāṇā cetovimutti, akiñcaññā cetovimutti* and *animittā cetovimutti* - could be used as expressions to designate final and unshakeable liberation of the mind, *akuppā cetovimutti* (MN I 298). Final liberation goes beyond the “bounds” or “limits”,

pamāṇa, set by the three root defilements of passion, anger and delusion. At the same time it goes beyond their "somethingness", *kiñcana*, and their tendency to "make signs", *nimittakaraṇa*. Hence, when considered from this perspective, final liberation can indeed be qualified as a type of liberation of the mind that is boundless, that 'has' "nothing" and that is "signless", *appamāṇā*, *akiñcaññā* and *animittā*. Yet, of the different liberations of the mind considered so far, only liberation of the mind through emptiness, *suññatā cetovimutti*, seems to stand unequivocally for what the Pāli discourses consider to be true and permanent liberation, namely liberation from the notion of a self and its concomitant defilements.

24.3 Occasions for Attaining Liberation

Five occasions for the breakthrough to liberating insight are collected in the discourses under the heading of "spheres of liberation", *vimuttāyatana* (DN III 241; DN III 279 and AN III 21). These take place:

1) when hearing the *Dhamma*;
2) when teaching the *Dhamma* to others;
3) when reciting the *Dhamma*;
4) when reflecting about the *Dhamma*;
5) during meditation.

The last reads more literally: "having well grasped some sign of concentration, having well given attention to it, having well held it [in one's mind], having well penetrated it with wisdom". Though in some Pāli discourses the "sign of concentration" stands for the vision of a corpse in decay (DN III 226 and AN II 17), the original intention of the description of the fifth sphere of liberation need not have been restricted to contemplating a corpse, but could be understood to comprise any sign of concentration that can be apprehended during meditation practice.

On each of these five occasions for liberation, what takes place, according to the description given in the Pāli discourses, is that one comes to have a direct grasp of the teachings in spirit and letter. Due to this delight and joy arise, which in turn lead to tranquillity and concentration.

Judging from this description, it seems that the direct grasp of the teachings arrived at by way of any of these five spheres of liberation brings into being three qualities that are also part of the standard listing of the factors of awakening: joy, *pīti*, tranquillity, *passaddhi*, and concentration, *samādhi*.

In the description of the consecutive development of the seven factors of awakening in the *Ānāpānasati-sutta*, these three are preceded by mindfulness and investigation-of-phenomena (MN III 85). If the parallelism between the awakening factors and the present description holds, then the process that leads up to and corresponds to the direct grasp of the teachings through any of these five spheres of liberation would correspond to the development of mindfulness and of investigation-of-phenomena.

The basic dynamic of development that ensues based on any of the five spheres of liberation is the same, thus what differentiates them into five is the way this development is triggered. The *Peṭakopadesa* clarifies that in the case of the first sphere of liberation the trigger is [the understanding that arises from] hearing the teachings, in the case of the second and the third spheres of liberation the decisive factor is consolidation [of one's understanding of the teachings] through teaching or reciting; the fourth sphere of liberation involves careful mental consideration when one reflects about the *Dhamma*; and the fifth sphere of liberation, actual meditation, leads to penetrating [the teachings] well with right view (Peṭ 233).

Descriptions of these five spheres of liberation in the *Dīrgha-āgama* preserved in Chinese translation differ in so far as they

have an additional introductory statement, according to which these five spheres of liberation lead to liberation if one is energetic without remiss, delights in seclusion, and has developed mindfulness as well as a mind that is one-pointed (T I 51c3 and T I 53c15).

This stipulation makes it clear that to reach liberation requires more than just hearing the *Dhamma*, or else reciting it or reflecting about it. The point to be kept in mind here is that the five spheres of liberation represent occasions when mature practice may culminate in a breakthrough to liberating insight. They are not descriptions of the course of training that leads up to such a breakthrough. Previous training in virtue, concentration and wisdom would be required in order for the mind to reach that level of maturity where the occasions afforded by any of the five spheres of liberation can issue in liberation.

In agreement with the Pāli account, the *Dīrgha-āgama* presentation indicates that, through grasping the teachings on any of these five occasions, joy, tranquillity and concentration arise. The *Dīrgha-āgama* description continues after the stage of concentration by indicating that with a mind concentrated in this way one sees things according to reality (T I 51c9 and T I 53c20). This stipulation echoes a recurrent description in the Pāli discourses, according to which concentration leads to a vision of things according to reality, which then forms the basis for attaining liberation (e.g. AN V 3).

How seeing things as they truly are then leads on to actual liberation can be gathered from the descriptions of the five spheres of liberation given in the *Saṅgītiparyāya* and the *Abhidharmakośavyākhyā*. According to their account, disenchantment and dispassion arise based on such a vision of things according to reality, and it is through such disenchantment and dispassion that liberation takes place (T XXVI 424a11 and Wogihara 1971: 54; also Pāsādika1990: 26). The *Saṅgītiparyāya* further explains that such vision of things according to

reality is concerned with the four noble truths, a vision that then leads to disenchantment in regard to the five aggregates of clinging. Through the ensuing dispassion, the three roots of evil – greed, hatred and delusion – will be overcome and liberation will be attained (T XXVI 425b1).

24.4 Liberated Beings

Progress towards final liberation proceeds through stages and may involve the development of other types of liberation to differing degrees. This variety of approaches is reflected in a listing of seven types of disciples (e.g. MN I 477):

- one who is liberated both ways;
- one who is liberated by wisdom;
- one who is a body-witness;
- one who has attained to view;
- one who is liberated by faith;
- one who is a *Dhamma*-follower;
- one who is a faith-follower.

Notably, one of these disciples is reckoned to be 'liberated' by faith, the *saddhāvimutta*. According to the definition given, someone liberated by faith has not developed the ability to attain the immaterial attainments and only some of his or her influxes have been eradicated (MN I 478). That is, someone liberated by faith could be a stream-enterer, a once-returner, or a non-returner (AN I 120). By having attained stream-entry at the very least, someone liberated by faith is 'liberated' from the prospect of any lower rebirth and also from the uncertainty of doubt and perplexity through being endowed with unwavering confidence, *aveccapasāda*, in the Buddha, the *Dhamma* and the *Saṅgha* (SN V 357).

The notion of being liberated by faith introduces a different aspect into the types of liberations discussed so far, which were the outcome of developing concentration and / or wis-

dom. Though concentration and wisdom are certainly also required for becoming one who is liberated by faith, the distinctive characteristic of this type of noble disciple is the prominence of the faculty of faith or confidence (AN I 118).

A higher level of liberation is reached by the one who is 'liberated' by wisdom, *paññāvimutta*. This refers to an *arahant* who has not developed the ability to attain the immaterial attainments (MN I 477), though he or she would nevertheless be well aware of their impermanent and ultimately unsatisfactory nature (DN II 70). This awareness could explain why someone liberated by wisdom may not make any further effort for developing the immaterial attainments, once final liberation has been won, since clear understanding of the impermanent and unsatisfactory nature of such attainments would make any effort to attain them appear futile.

A discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* distinguishes different types of *arahant*s that are liberated by wisdom, according to their ability in the realm of concentration. In this discourse, the lowest type of being liberated by wisdom is able to attain the first *jhāna* (AN IV 452). This indicates that, at least from the perspective of this discourse, one liberated by wisdom would not be completely bereft of *jhāna* attainment. The same discourse does, however, also list someone liberated by wisdom who is able to attain the immaterial attainments, which is not easy to reconcile with the definition of an *arahant* liberated by wisdom given elsewhere.

The nature of one who is liberated by wisdom was apparently not easily appreciated by the Buddha's contemporaries. The *Susīma-sutta* reports the puzzlement of the wanderer Susīma in this respect, who had become a monk in order to spy out the Buddha's teaching. When other monks declared to have won final knowledge, Susīma was perplexed by the fact that they were not able to avail themselves of supernatural powers, nor did they have the divine ear, telepathic knowledge of the

mind of others, recollection of past lives, the divine eye, or the ability to enter the immaterial attainments (SN II 123).

His perplexity suggests that the early Buddhist conception of one who has been fully liberated by wisdom was unusual in the ancient Indian setting, where the attainment of the final goal was apparently associated with the ability of displaying supernormal abilities. In reply to Susīma's puzzlement, the Buddha clarified that it is insight, in the sense of knowledge of the stability of the *Dhamma*, *dhammaṭṭhitiñāṇa*, which is the precursor of the experience of *Nibbāna* (SN II 124). This reply highlights that the attainment of *Nibbāna* does not require the development of any supernatural powers. Instead, penetrative insight into the true nature of things is required,which then leads to liberation by higher knowledge, *aññāvimutti* (AN I 231).

Such penetrative insight is the distinctive mark of one who is liberated by wisdom, who has overcome all ignorance (Sn 847). From a discourse in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* one could get the impression that those who were liberated by wisdom were the most numerous type of *arahant*. At least on this occasion, sixty out of a congregation of five-hundred *arahant*s were endowed with the triple knowledge, sixty had the six higher knowledges, sixty were liberated both ways, but three-hundred-and-twenty were liberated by wisdom (SN I 191). This presentation also highlights that someone liberated by wisdom need not have developed the first two of the three higher knowledges, *tevijjā*, whose exercise requires the same mental strength of the mind that forms the basis for reaching the immaterial attainments, namely the fourth *jhāna*.

Another type of *arahant* mentioned in the above seven-fold listing of disciples is the one who is "liberated both ways", *ubhatobhāgavimutta*. Such an *arahant* is able to attain the immaterial attainments (MN I 477), and therefore is perfected also in this respect (AN IV 316). He or she "has a more complete type of liberation because of his [or her] meditative skill"

(Wynne 2002: 35). The *Mahānidāna-sutta* defines the same type of *arahant* in a slightly different manner by indicating that he or she has mastery over the eight deliverances (DN II 71). A complement to this can then be found in a discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, which describes an *arahant* bereft of the ability to attain all eight deliverances (AN II 87). This discourse compares such an *arahant* to a coloured lotus, whereas an *arahant* who attains all eight deliverances is like a white lotus. Thus the theme of this presentation is indeed the difference between those who are liberated by wisdom and those who are liberated both ways, a difference elsewhere said to be related to differences in their respective faculties, *indriyavemattatā* (MN I 437).

Though *arahant*s may differ in their degree of accomplishment in the realm of concentration, with the attainment of *arahant*-ship their liberation of the mind has become unshakeable, *akuppā cetovimutti*. When liberation of the mind is qualified as unshakeable it indeed stands for the final goal of early Buddhism, being a type of liberation that is no longer temporary.

During the course of the history of Buddhism, the final nature of this attainment eventually became a matter for discussion among different Buddhist schools, some of which developed the concept of an *arahant* who is liable to fall away again from his or her level of attainment, the *parihānadharma arhant* (Abhidh-k 6.56; see also Kv-a 37). This, however, appears to be a later development. In the Pāli discourses, once someone has reached the unshakeable liberation of the mind and liberation by wisdom, *akuppā cetovimutti paññāvimutti*, and has thereby destroyed the influxes, no falling back from this level of liberation is envisaged.

24.5 The Path to Liberation

The Pāli discourses reckon the liberation of an *arahant* as a manifestation of "right liberation", *sammā vimutti*, being the

fruit of a successful undertaking of the noble eightfold path and thus the very opposite of wrong types of liberation, *micchā vimutti*. Reaching such right liberation features as the last in a list of ten qualities of an *arahant*, preceded by the factors of the noble eightfold path and right knowledge, *sammā ñāṇa* (MN III 76).

It is noteworthy that in the Pāli discourses "right liberation", *sammā vimutti* is invariably preceded by "right knowledge", *sammā ñāṇa*, whereas in the Chinese *Āgamas* the opposite sequence prevails, as discourses in the *Dīrgha-āgama* (e.g. T I 57b17), in the *Madhyama-āgama* (e.g. T I 736b19) and in the *Saṃyukta-āgama* (e.g. T II 122c7) have right knowledge as the last in their listing, preceded by right liberation. The same sequence is also found in Sanskrit fragments of the *Saṅgīti-sūtra* and the *Daśottara-sūtra* (Stache-Rosen 1968: 205 and Schlingloff 1962: 25).

According to an explanation given in the *Madhyama-āgama* and in the *Saṃyukta-āgama*, right knowledge stands for the retrospective knowledge of having achieved right liberation (T I 736b19 and T II 198c11). This explanation squares with the Pāli commentaries, which explain right knowledge to represent reviewing knowledge, *paccavekkhaṇāñāṇam 'sammāñāṇaṃ' ti vuccati* (Ps I 189).

Following this explanation, it would indeed seem more suitable to list right knowledge after right liberation. This is in fact the case in another type of listing in the Pāli discourses where the "aggregate of liberation", *vimuttikkhandha*, is followed by the "aggregate of knowledge and vision of liberation", *vimuttiñāṇadassanakkhandha* (e.g. SN V 162). Yet, the same type of listing precedes the aggregate of liberation with the "aggregate of wisdom", *paññākkhandha*, so that perhaps the reference in the Pāli discourses to right knowledge as what precedes right liberation should be understood to represent the type of knowledge or wisdom that issues in liberation.

Whatever may be the final word on the proper sequence of listing right knowledge and right liberation, the type of knowledge and wisdom that will lead to unshakeable liberation needs to be in accordance with reality, *yathābhūta*, and has to generate disenchantment and dispassion. For knowledge to issue in liberation it needs to be based on right concentration and on a good foundation in ethical conduct, mindfulness and sense-restraint. All these factors are required for liberation, just as the foliage, branches and bark of a tree are required for the heartwood to come to maturity (AN IV 336). Yet, as the *Mahāsāropama-sutta* and the *Cūḷasāropama-sutta* clarify, none of these should be mistaken for being the final goal, which would be like mistaking foliage, branch or bark for the heartwood (MN I 197 and MN I 205). That is, the means should not be confused with the goal.

A complementary perspective on the requirements for liberation is given in the *Mahāvedalla-sutta*, which presents right view, virtuous conduct, learning, [suitable] conversation, tranquillity and insight as the factors that lead to liberation of the mind and liberation by wisdom (MN I 294). Perhaps the most important requirement for bringing about liberation are the seven factors of awakening, *bojjhaṅga*, whose liberating potential comes to the fore once they are developed based on seclusion, dispassion and cessation, in this way leading to letting go (MN III 88).

According to a listing of nine factors of exertion for purification in the *Dasuttara-sutta*, the purification to be attained through final liberation requires progress through the seven stages of purification, as well as through purification by wisdom, *paññāvisuddhi* (DN III 288). The *Sāmugiya-sutta* explains that purity of liberation, *vimuttipārisuddhi*, comes about when one touches right liberation after having developed dispassion and after having liberated the mind, *rajanīyesu dham-*

mesu cittaṃ virājetvā, vimocanīyesu dhammesu cittaṃ vimocetvā, sammāvimuttiṃ phusati (AN II 196).

This explanation is significant, since it shows that dispassion, *virāga*, though at times acting as a synonym for final liberation, in contexts like the present clearly stands for something that precedes actual liberation. In fact, a listing of recipients of offerings in the *Dakkhiṇāvibhaṅga-sutta* quite explicitly speaks of an outsider who has reached dispassion towards sensual things, *bāhiraka kāmesu vītarāga* (MN III 255), a presentation that would evidently not imply that he had reached final liberation.

This provides the necessary background to a statement in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, which links dispassion, in the sense of the fading away of passion, to liberation of the mind, followed by relating the fading away of ignorance to liberation by wisdom, *rāgavirāgā cetovimutti, avijjāvirāgā paññāvimutti* (AN I 61). This presentation has at times been understood to represent two different paths that lead to two different types of liberation (see e.g. Gombrich 1996: 114). In the light of the above passages, however, the implications of this passage can be clarified. Dispassion, or the "fading away of passion", *rāgavirāga*, is indeed a precondition for liberation of the mind, *cetovimutti*, which comprises various levels of liberation to be reached through the development of deeper stages of concentration. Such development, as the standard description of the first *jhāna* explicitly indicates, requires the leaving behind of all matters related to sensuality, *vivicc' eva kāmehi* (e.g. DN I 73).

Yet, such liberation of the mind through dispassion, which the above *Aṅguttara-nikāya* passage quite explicitly introduces as the outcome of the development of tranquillity, *samatha*, falls short of being the final goal, as it is only a temporary type of liberation. Final liberation additionally requires insight, *vipassanā*, which leads to the development of wisdom, *paññā bhāvīyati*, and to the removal of ignorance, *avijjā sā pahīyati*

(AN I 61). Hence instead of intending two different paths to two different goals, what this passage in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* describes are two complementary aspects of the path to the final goal, one of which is incapable of leading to full liberation on its own.

The central point remains the removal of ignorance, and it is this removal which issues in being completely liberated by final knowledge, *sammadaññāvimutta* (MN III 30). With such final knowledge an inner state of deliverance has been reached, wherein all clinging is destroyed and all influxes are removed (SN II 54). Such liberation implies that delight and passion have been completely destroyed (SN III 51). Once liberation through non-clinging has been accomplished (SN II 18), the round [of faring on in *saṃsāra*] has been left behind for good (SN IV 391). In this way, liberation from being reckoned in terms of any of the five aggregates has been reached (MN I 487), and one has been liberated by the highest deliverance from perception (Sn 1071).

This highest deliverance from perception is none other than the experience of *Nibbāna*, which is the "counterpart" to liberation (MN I 304), and the "resort" of liberation (SN V 218); wherefore *Nibbāna* is the very purpose of liberation (SN III 189).

A telling description of the liberating attainment of *Nibbāna* as the highest deliverance from perception is given by *bhikkhunī* Paṭācārā, who explains that just like the *Nibbāna* of her lamp, which she had just put out, so was the liberation of her mind (Thī 116).

To attain such liberation is to arrive at the very essence of all things, *vimuttisārā sabbe dhammā* (AN V 107). Such attainment is the very purpose all the teachings and instructions given by the Buddha. Just as the ocean has a single taste, namely the taste of salt, so the teachings of the Buddha have a single

taste, namely the taste of liberation (Ud 56). With final liberation attained, the holy life has been lived and what had to be done has been done. The prospective of future birth has been eradicated and there will be no more coming to any state of being (e.g. DN I 84).

Having won liberation, the noble disciple has pierced this huge mass of ignorance just like a skilled warrior pierces huge objects with his arrow (AN II 202). The liberation attained in this manner is like the white awning of a chariot (SN IV 291); or like the final rubbing and grooming a horse trainer gives a horse that has been thoroughly trained and is worthy of being put to service by the king (MN I 446).

One who has reached liberation of the mind and liberation by wisdom has lifted up the cross-bar; has filled the moat; uprooted the pillar; withdrawn the bolts; lowered the banner; dropped the burden and is unfettered (AN III 84). Here the cross-bar stands for ignorance, the moat for faring on in *saṃsāra*, the pillar for craving, the bolts for the five lower fetters, while the banner and the burden both represent the conceit 'I am'.

Just as a head-anointed king endowed with treasures, a strong army and wise counsellors is at home anywhere in his realm, similarly those who have reached such liberation are freed in mind wherever they may dwell (AN III 152). Dwelling freed in mind in this way, they are aloof from the world like a lotus that has risen above water (AN V 152). Undefiled like a lotus that has risen above water, freed like the wind that cannot be caught in a net, a liberated one is a leader of others, having gone beyond any need to be led by others (Sn 213).

Abbreviations

Abhidh-k	*Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*
Abhidh-s	*Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*
AN	*Aṅguttara-nikāya*
As	*Atthasālinī*
Cp	*Cariyāpiṭaka*
D	Derge edition
Dhp	*Dhammapada*
Dhs	*Dhammasaṅgaṇī*
DN	*Dīgha-nikāya*
It	*Itivuttaka*
Khp	*Khuddakapāṭha*
Kv-a	*Kathāvatthu-aṭṭhakathā*
Mil	*Milindapañha*
MN	*Majjhima-nikāya*
Mp	*Manorathapūraṇī*
Nett	*Nettipakaraṇa*
Paṭis	*Paṭisambhidāmagga*
Peṭ	*Peṭakopadesa*
Ps	*Papañcasūdanī*
Sn	*Sutta-nipāta*
SN	*Saṃyutta-nikāya*
Spk	*Sāratthappakāsinī*
Sv	*Sumaṅgalavilāsinī*
T	Taishō
Th	*Theragāthā*
Thī	*Therīgāthā*
Ud	*Udāna*
Ud-a	*Paramatthadīpanī*
Vibh	*Vibhaṅga*
Vin	*Vinaya*
Vism	*Visuddhimagga*

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